AN APPRECIATIVE LIFE OF THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD





THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

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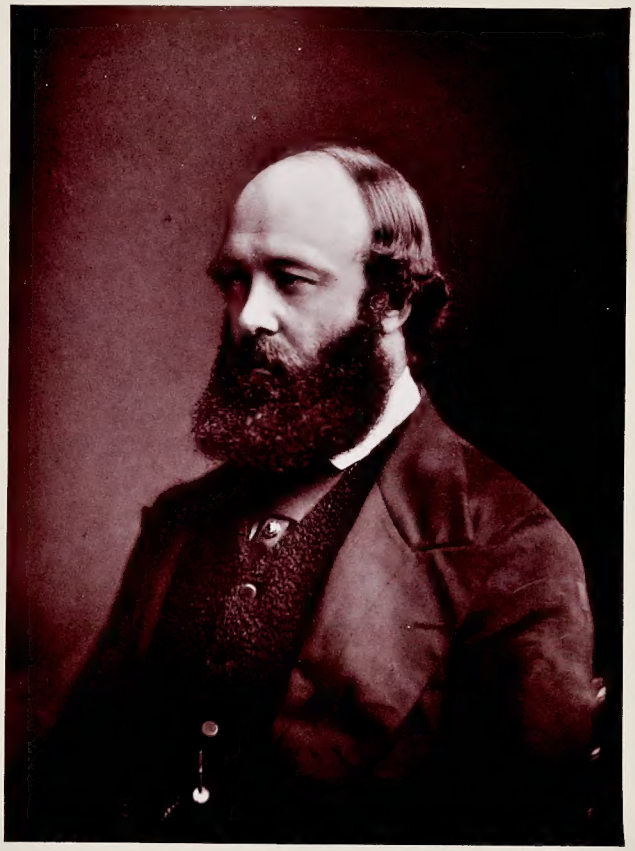
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HUGHENDEN MANOR.

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MARQUIS OF SALISBURY.

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OF

THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

NOTTINGHAM: PRINTED BY THOS. FORMAN AND SONS.

AN APPRECIATIVE LIFE

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RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF

BEACONSFIELD,

A Statesman of 'Light and Leading.'

WITH

PORTRAITS OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

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PREFACE.

FOR at least two cogent reasons the life of the late EARL OF BEACONSFIELD is worthy of careful study. He took so prominent a part in guiding the destinies of the nation during an important period, that a true knowledge of his life is indispensable to all who would be thoroughly familiar with the history of the nineteenth century; and he worked his way to greatness and power amidst manifold disadvantages and discouragements so manfully, so heroically, so skilfully, that his biography is replete with interesting and instructive lessons illustrating the value of energy, determination, and courage; and furnishing, especially to the young, a powerful stimulus to untiring exertion.

To reap the full benefit of a careful consideration of his lordship's brilliant career, we must clear our minds of any prejudice which a superabundance of depreciatory comments may have produced, and be prepared to put a correct and consistent interpretation on all that he said and did. It is not necessary that we should gloss over frailties, or blind ourselves to obvious faults, where such exist; but it is essential that we should read thoughtfully, judge impartially, and not jump to rash conclusions which in more generous moments we should reverse and regret. We must take a just, a candid, and a kindly view if we would derive that present interest and enduring profit from the study which it is so capable of giving.

Hence it is that we venture to offer to the public what we have termed an appreciative biography. We have not set ourselves the superfluous task of singing, in season and out of season, the praises

of Lord Beaconsfield; but we have invited friendly hands to draw such a picture of his life and conduct as the circumstances justly warrant. Each portion of the work has been assigned to a competent writer, and an effort has been made so to divide the labour as to ensure its efficient execution. For instance, the chapter wherein is described the celebrated maiden speech in the House of Commons, has been written by a gentleman who was present on the occasion and had exceptional opportunities of witnessing all that took place.

The Editor desires to acknowledge gratefully the prompt and cordial manner in which all those to whom he has applied for literary assistance or information have responded to his appeal. Their kindness has enabled him to present some interesting original matter, including personal reminiscences, which might not otherwise have been available for publication.

In securing suitable and acceptable illustrations, no pains or expense have been spared. Of their excellence the Editor need say nothing. The names of the artists are given in most cases, and their work will, he has no doubt, prove a standing testimony to their artistic skill.

The beautiful photograph of the Earl of Beaconsfield which forms the frontispiece to this work has been supplied by the eminent firm of W. & D. Downey, photographers to the Queen.

C. B.

July, 1881.

THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

'"Ah!" said Coningsby, "I should like to be a great man."'
'Nurture your mind with great thoughts. To believe in the heroic makes heroes.'—*Coningsby.*

'THE affairs of the world are directed by sovereigns and statesmen,' said the late Earl of Beaconsfield on a celebrated occasion. Admitting, as all must, the substantial accuracy of that assertion, it follows that if we would rightly understand the history of a people or of an epoch, we must endeavour to realise not merely the events, but also the characters, the principles, and the surroundings of the men to whose initiative they were owing, or by whose influence they were directed. The man is not the epoch, but he is so important an interpreter of its spirit, and so potent an actor in its drama, that to separate *him* and *it* is to leave each incomplete. No man thinks of our own civil war but there rises up in his mind's eye the stern and rugged features of Oliver Cromwell, or the melancholy lineaments of King Charles, or the keen visage of the fiery Rupert. Who can realise the French Revolution apart from Mirabeau, Danton, St. Just, Robespierre, and Marat; or turn the pages in which are recorded the victories of the Consulate and Empire without recognising in the figure of the mighty General and too ambitious Emperor that of the man whose name will ever be identified with the events which filled those miserable and bloodstained years? So with the War of Independence by the United States, so with the War of Secession, and so with many other instances we might name. The 'battles, sieges, fortunes' of

each are but as the variations of an old theme; it is when we come to study the men who were the actors that we begin to realise the true meaning of the drama which the page of history has unrolled before us, and are enabled to draw conclusions which may be of value to us in the present, or may indicate a method of escape from the perils which may appear to be looming in the future.

Biography has been termed the detail of history, and so in a sense it is; but it may be asserted, without much fear of contradiction, that it is a detail which must be studied ere we can comprehend the whole. Biography, too, has the advantage of presenting us with a record that comes more immediately home to our sympathies, and appeals more directly to our human and social affections, than the more stately and swelling story which the muse of history repeats. In the battle of the world the great events alone may for the moment claim the loudest plaudits and exact the more attention, but it is by the light of individual narrations that we gather the fuller details of the struggle, and it is in following step by step the career of the individual combatant that we find our deepest sympathies aroused. If this be true of average individualities it is emphatically true of great men who have risen by their own efforts, and by the exercise of the talents with which God has gifted them. The student, following the career of such an one, feels not only sympathy but also emulation. The record of great achievements dazzles; the story in detail of how those achievements were made possible stimulates. The statesman wielding the destinies of nations, the general directing the forces of a mighty empire, the orator holding multitudes spell-bound, are each embodiments of a success which may excite admiration but which does not at the first rouse any feeling of rivalry. But when we come to trace step by step such careers, to see how each—'while his companions slept'—was toiling upward, the mind is braced to endeavour, and generous emulation is aroused which, put into action, may mould the whole future life, and make that noble which, but for the stimulus thus supplied, might have remained slothful, inert, and apathetic.

Such a lesson, such a stimulus to endeavour, such a corrective to despair as biography can supply, we find ready to our hand in the life of the great man who has but recently passed from our midst, and whose career, as 'wondrous' in its way as that of his own *Alroy*, we design to trace. Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, was a man whose many-sided greatness we have not yet fully appreciated, though since his death he has been estimated more justly by the men of that England he loved so much, and of whose honour and good name he was so proudly jealous. With Lord Beaconsfield has fallen the statesman whom the diplomatists of Europe respected and feared, the minister whose cool sagacity baffled their most deeply laid schemes, the patriot whose stern directness of warning 'gave pause' to their most audacious projects, the politician whose vigilance never slept, the man who never quailed before a foe, or failed to aid with service, fortune, and voice, those whom he honoured by calling his friends. Nor does this eulogy do more than indicate one side of the man we have lost, for had not the Earl of Beaconsfield been great as a statesman he would have had a claim on the proud remembrance of his countrymen as one of the most effective orators, and assuredly one of the most terrible debaters, whom the British House of Commons ever knew. Few men in that assembly, rich as it has ever been in talent, cared to cross swords in debate with Benjamin Disraeli—fewer yet ever essayed to do so and came off victors.

But going farther yet, putting aside Earl Beaconsfield's triumphs as a statesman and orator, we would claim for him the honour of being the most adroit, skilful, and sagacious, of political leaders. His influence over men was wonderful, his personal manner inexpressibly winning, his courage under defeat or in face of apparently insurmountable obstacles unshaken, his patience inexhaustible. 'Change kings with us, and we will fight the battle again,' was the reply of Sarsfield after the Battle of the Boyne to a taunt on the defeat of his countrymen. 'Change leaders with us and we will fight the battle again,' might have been the cry of the discomfited Liberals

when Lord Beaconsfield had once more led his followers to victory. Few men knew the House of Commons as Mr. Disraeli knew it, few men had the capacity for so inspiriting friends and cowing enemies, and not even Lord Palmerston was, we believe, his equal in seizing upon the dominant mood of the House and swaying it to his will. Statesman, orator, debater, politician—all are titles to fame which the world readily honours; but Benjamin Disraeli would have been a great man apart from his political career, and apart from his long association with the greatest legislative assembly in the world. 'Literature is my only escutcheon,' said he once, with proud humility; and had no other honour been put upon him, as a man of no mean repute in the literature of his time would Benjamin Disraeli have gone down to posterity. And his literary work was, on the whole, as excellent as it was varied, as original as it was, voluminous.

From 'Vivian Grey' to 'Endymion' there are no two of his novels alike, and there is certainly no one like anything else in English literature. They are unique, and they are such as we shall in the future probably never see equalled in their peculiar excellencies. That we have novels as good, or better, we do not deny; that we have novels more popular is a truism; but we have no novels like those of Disraeli. They stand alone, and on them might any man be proud to rest his claims to honourable distinction in the annals of his country. Yet with Lord Beaconsfield they ever seemed but the mere casual outpourings of a full mind seeking utterance, and seizing upon fiction as the readiest mode of attaining it. The prize for which other men struggle long and vainly he gained, as it seemed, without an effort, and accepted without exultation. Surely, then, this man, great in so many ways, was favoured by birth, or was a spoiled child of wealth? Not at all. Benjamin Disraeli came of an ancient but despised race; his surroundings in early years were extremely modest; great wealth he never possessed, nor strove after, nor cared for, and the station he gained he won by sheer force of genius, foresight, intense application, strenuous

effort, unwavering courage, patient pertinacity. When we come to trace more particularly the events of Lord Beaconsfield's life, the reader will find ample justification for the warmth of the eulogy we have pronounced, and will perchance find, too, that the facts would have justified language even more enthusiastic.

That such an opinion would have been rudely challenged in Lord Beaconsfield's lifetime is unfortunately true, but now the claim may be made more confidently, for it is day by day becoming more clear to his countrymen how sorely, how ungenerously, how persistently this 'man of the people' was misjudged, misrepresented, villified. It is difficult for us now-a-days to discover what was the particular feature or circumstance in Mr. Disraeli which from a young man seemed to single him out as one of the favourite marks for the arrows of calumny, and why to him more than others the press of England was so generally hostile. 'A young adventurer' was one of the earliest terms of reproach applied to him; 'an adventurer' was almost the last gibe in the mouths of his enemies in the hour of his triumphant success. If by 'adventurer' be meant one who changes his opinions to suit his personal ends, the charge is singularly inapplicable to the late Earl of Beaconsfield; for his career, looked at as a whole, and generously judged from his own standpoint, was remarkably consistent; and he carried out in manhood the opinions he avowed in youth. It has been said that in his early days Lord Beaconsfield was a Radical. He was; and, in the sense in which he used the term, he was a Radical to the end of his life. He has been reproached as a rigid Tory; in a sense he was a Tory too, and there is no inconsistency involved in the conjunction. The fault lay not with the great Earl but with his critics, who accepted a party designation as a political definition, and raised a nickname to the dignity of a creed.

Rightly judged, Lord Beaconsfield's political life was consistent from first to last, and had it been otherwise he would not have been without precedent for such change of opinion, nor would he have needed to look far for a modern instance. Mere change of

opinion would not, however, have accounted for the bitterness or the malignity with which Mr. Disraeli was assailed; nor would the fact of his success explain it, nor the exigencies of party warfare palliate it. Never a free liver, or one who set the decencies of life at defiance, as did some of his early contemporaries, it cannot be said that Mr. Disraeli provoked enmity by his private excesses; in social life he was universally voted fascinating. What then was the secret of this determined hostility, this rancorous vituperation, this malignity of attack to which he was ever exposed? That question we hope to answer in subsequent pages; now we may be content to say that it arose from a variety of motives, mostly unworthy, and from a party and social hostility almost wholly ignoble.

Some of the critics of Lord Beaconsfield, in the public press, appear to have written of his life in this spirit. Their object has not been to present to us the man as he was, but to hold up a hideous caricature and then pour contempt upon it. His writings have been ransacked for passages that could be twisted into evidences of self-condemnation. Such attacks in life irritated Lord Beaconsfield's friends; now he is gone, indignation succeeds irritation. For himself, he ever treated worthless satire with calm disdain, and mere vituperation was passed over in silence. Ready enough for combat, he yet could not afford to waste his strength in trivial conflicts. With cool contempt he suffered his assailants, on numerous occasions, to circulate inaccuracies, and impute motives, when a word, or a few lines of print, would have sufficed to crush them.

But if Lord Beaconsfield was thus himself indifferent, it is the more incumbent on men who hold him in esteem to refute those who condemn him, and to convince fair and reasonable opponents that they have misjudged him. Something too is due to posterity. Assertions recklessly made, and left contemptuously unanswered, have an ugly knack of reappearing when refutation has become, from lapse of time, impossible; and many a stain may rest for years on a fair reputation simply because no one cared to investigate the story, but each carelessly took it from the other, and time almost

consecrated the error into a truth it was absurd to doubt. In Lord Beaconsfield's case political and party rancour have for years striven how to misrepresent him most effectually; the pencil of the caricaturist has backed up the pen of the political enthusiast, and so persistently has the *mitraille* of abuse been kept up, that many people, not themselves ungenerous or uncandid, have been led to take an ungenerous and uncandid view of him.

Such of these misrepresentations as we may meet with we shall, in the course of this biography, endeavour to put right; such attacks as we think worthy the labour we shall rebut; while such errors as fairness bids us acknowledge we shall frankly lay bare. Lord Beaconsfield was far too great a man to need any undue eulogy; much too honest a man to care for a reputation which he had not earned; much too honourable a man to knowingly commit himself to a wretched subterfuge or evasion in order to avoid the acknowledgment of a fault. He erred, as we have all erred since Adam fell, but his errors were never ignoble ones; and if we can succeed in presenting him to our readers as he has for years seemed to us, we shall convince them that what errors he did commit were magnificently atoned for. One trait of his lordship's character we may mention in this connection. Bitterly as he was attacked himself, he was rarely the aggressor,—the speeches against Sir R. Peel notwithstanding,—and it might be almost said that, except in a political sense, he was pre-eminently a man of peace. This brilliant orator, this bitter sayer of keen things, this man whose powers of sarcasm made him dreaded by his foes, was at heart a kindly gentleman, loved by his personal friends as few have been, respected by his colleagues, affectionately regarded by his dependants. Above all he seemed incapable of sustained resentment. In the heat of debate, or in the course of political strife, hard words might be said, and hard knocks interchanged—and Lord Beaconsfield was not the man to hang back when hard fighting was in progress; but the battle over, he never 'bore malice.' The anger and bitterness passed away, and he was ever ready to join hands with any honourable foe when

the day of mutual explanations came. To this sweetness of disposition add his rare gifts of intellect, his suavity of manner, his unselfish desire to help others, his generous appreciation and acknowledgment of even trifling services, and we get, perhaps, an inkling of what Sir Stafford Northcote meant when, in a speech made a few days after the Earl's death, he remarked, 'Those who did know and love him, loved him very much.'

What Benjamin Disraeli might have become had his surroundings been different, it is difficult to imagine. We cannot but think that he must, under almost any circumstances, have been a great man, and we think, too, the bent of his genius would sooner or later have carried him towards politics; he was a statesman and politician almost by instinct, as some men are artists or poets. We have evidence that very early in life he had pondered, and studied deeply, the political and social problems of his day, and had worked out, albeit dimly, some great principles from which he never wavered. Men who knew, we will charitably hope, little of Mr. Disraeli either personally or politically, have said that he had no principles, that his political tactics were the inspiration of the moment, and his political actions guided by mere rule of thumb. Never was made a more unfounded assertion. The political creed of the Earl of Beaconsfield is but the political creed of Benjamin Disraeli, mellowed by time and modified by experience.

Let us see for a moment if we can get at the creed of this man of 'no principles,' and note briefly what it involves. In the first place, then, Lord Beaconsfield felt more than most men the stirrings of that sublime, but now unfashionable, virtue—patriotism. He revered the great deeds of the past, and sought from them incentives to the duties of the present. Over his mind the ancient, the august, the magnificent had special sway. He honoured them, and he thought them worthy of honour. To this feeling we may refer his ardent attachment to constitutional usages and precepts.

The same feelings which made him a lover of his race and of his adopted country and her leaders by right of descent, made him

also a loyal subject of the crown, and, speaking of course in a political sense, a staunch upholder of the church. Regarded from this side of his nature, the Earl of Beaconsfield might well pass with the unthinking as a rigid Tory of the old school. A Tory he was, but he was something more. He reverenced the crown, the church, and the nobles, because he saw in them the representatives of the stability of the state, and the guardians of the well-being of the people; but no man had ever a profounder sympathy with the people than Lord Beaconsfield. A mere cynic could never have written 'Sybil;' a mere 'adventurer' could never have understood that there lay hid, and crushed, and mangled, under a prosperous looking 'manufacturing interest,' a mass of suffering humanity which had claims on the sympathy of the aristocracy; and no man except one who loved the people would have dared to speak out so boldly, and tell England's aristocracy that their duty was to step forward to the aid of England's people.

This Benjamin Disraeli did as a young man, and as a man of maturer years he did something more,—he restored to the working classes that place in the constitution of which the Whig Reform Bill of 1832 had robbed them; and he passed more than one Act which had for its object to raise the masses in the social scale. Lord Beaconsfield was no admirer of class distinctions, but he was, as we all are, compelled to recognise them; and he quickly saw that in our social machinery there is one defect—worse then than now: that far too great a proportion of political power was in the hands of the lower middle class, and that the mass of the people on the one hand, and the crown and nobles on the other, were shorn of their legitimate influence.

The true golden mean of safety lay, in his opinion, in a harmonious and smoothly-working adjustment of all parts of the constitution: crown, aristocracy, people; and it was this harmonious adjustment of parts, this fair balancing and allocation of duties, responsibilities, and power, which was ever the end and aim of Lord Beaconsfield in home politics. He thought the masses were unduly weak—politically,

and he bestowed on them the franchise; he saw that the House of Commons was engrossing an unfair and predominating power in the state, and he sought to strengthen the aristocracy and the crown; he perceived that the agricultural interest bore more than a fair share of the burdens of the nation, and he sought to mitigate the load of taxation which it carried. The principle here is not, we think, difficult to understand, and it will explain much in Lord Beaconsfield that else appears contradictory when we remember that he was working out the same dominant idea in different ways. Lord Beaconsfield was an ardent lover of our constitution, but he saw clearly enough that the day had passed when the prerogative of the crown was to be feared. For the same reasons that would in the days of the Stuarts have made him a champion of the privileges of the parliament, Earl Beaconsfield in these later days proclaimed himself the champion of the prerogative of the crown. The liberties of the people are not now in any sort of danger from the personal action of the sovereign; the constitution if overthrown will be overthrown from the base and not shaken from the summit, and it was against this danger, which he saw was the existing one, that Lord Beaconsfield ever strove. With the masses of the people he had, as we have said, an intense sympathy. He commiserated the hardness, the dulness, the wearisome life which they so patiently endured, and his voice ever spoke out clearly and loudly on their behalf, while he sought to bind still closer the bonds which knitted the people to the throne.

Over forty years ago he thus described his aims:—'To change back the oligarchy into a generous aristocracy round a real throne; to infuse life and vigour into the church as the trainer of the nation, by the revival of its convocation, then dumb, on a wide basis; to establish a commercial code on the principles successfully negotiated by Lord Bolingbroke at Utrecht, and which, though baffled at the time by a Whig Parliament, were subsequently and triumphantly vindicated by his political pupil and heir, Mr. Pitt: to govern Ireland according to the policy of Charles I., and not

of Oliver Cromwell; to emancipate the political constituency of 1832 from its sectarian bondage and contracted sympathies; to elevate the physical as well as the moral condition of the people.'

When we turn to foreign affairs we have still less difficulty in pointing out the dominant principle in Lord Beaconsfield's policy—it was the advancement of the honour and interests of the empire by all legitimate means. We have used the word empire advisedly, for in that word may be said to lie the kernel of the differences between the policy of the Earl of Beaconsfield and that of his political opponents. In the mind of the late Earl the British empire was not co-terminus with the shores of the United Kingdom. He never regarded our colonies as held by a slack allegiance, or looked on our great dependency of India as an alien country, which we administered more or less, well or ill. To him it seemed that all was one vast and glorious empire bound together by common ties, and owning allegiance to one Sovereign—an empire such as the world never saw, with an inheritance of glorious traditions, and of the memories of proud triumphs; and it was his ambition to pass down to another generation all that we had received from our fathers, not only untarnished in honour and undiminished in power, but stronger, more honoured, more glorious than ever. Hence his impatience with that school of politicians whose cry was for diminished responsibilities, and contracted influence. To Lord Beaconsfield the honour of Great Britain was as dear as his own, and it angered him to see men, albeit in good faith and with benevolent intentions, trifling with her prestige or hesitating to vindicate her position. That Lord Beaconsfield had any liking for war in itself is not true, but he realised that dishonour was worse than war; and that calmly to ignore insults was not the way to avoid them. He felt that if Great Britain was to be at peace she must show herself ready on due occasion for war; if she would be respected by others, she must show that she respected herself; if she would be safe from insult, she must show herself swift to avenge it.

One other thing, too, Lord Beaconsfield steadily set himself to

do, when the power to act was placed in his hands, and that was to restore the lost belief in England's word. We do not mean that it was ever doubted but that English statesmen were honourable men, but there had arisen on the continent an all but universal belief that when Great Britain threatened she had no intention of fulfilling her threats. 'Mere sound and fury signifying nothing' would aptly have described the value which continental statesmen placed on English remonstrances, and such a condition of things was not only in the highest degree dishonourable to us, but was a constant source of danger. This was proved to be the case when we 'drifted' into the Crimean War. Had the Czar Nicholas and his advisers been convinced that England was in earnest, that war would never have taken place; but they had been so much in the habit of seeing England threaten and not strike, that they could not realise that under any circumstances could she be provoked to action. Lord Beaconsfield when in power effectually removed this reproach. He showed that, while he was at the head of affairs at all events, when Great Britain spoke she meant what she said. Hardly yet believing, the Muscovite, to use a vulgar but expressive phrase, 'tried it on' with the Treaty of San Stefano. The prompt reply was the passage of the Dardanelles by the fleet, the embodiment of the Reserves, the despatch of the Indian troops to Malta, and the vote of credit for £6,000,000. The Muscovite saw that Great Britain was not to be trifled with, and at once gave way. By this resolute action and attitude Lord Beaconsfield raised the influence of England to a pitch which it had not attained since the close of the wars of the French Revolution; and he did this, be it remembered, without the sacrifice of a single life, but by the sole force of an energetic will.

It is, we venture to think, of the utmost importance that a man such as Lord Beaconsfield was should be fairly judged, and fully appreciated, by his countrymen. A nation which has owed so much to the statesman and politician, the millions of readers who have enjoyed the creations of the novelist, will, we are convinced, be

glad to welcome a biography which shall as fully as possible place Lord Beaconsfield before them, and enable them to trace step by step that wonderful career, which, starting from 'a library,' culminated in the position of Prime Minister of England, and the personal friend of England's Queen. Few lives in modern times have been as eventful, as brilliant, and as protracted as that of Lord Beaconsfield. For over a quarter of a century he was a leading man in the House of Commons, and during that time directed and modified, to a degree difficult to over-estimate, the policy of England. His public life extended over some half-century of a most important epoch in the development of the English people; and amongst his personal friends were some of the most remarkable and illustrious men of the present day. Nor were they men of one type alone; for Lord Beaconsfield never forgot that if he was a politician he was also an author, and was ever ready, nay, ever eager, to recognise and praise good work, or to encourage modest talent.

An experience so varied, so extended, so unusual, would have made a history of interest had Lord Beaconsfield himself been but an ordinary man. He was far, however, from being an ordinary man in any aspect of his character, and he moved amongst statesmen and nobles, poets, historians and philosophers, as a peer of the proudest, and as a leader whom many, themselves illustrious, were proud to follow. From material so rich, so abundant, it will be our task to select what in our view tends to elucidate Lord Beaconsfield's career, not simply from the stand-point of the mere chronicler, but from that of the student wishing to realise for himself the man in all his many-sided greatness, and with all his peculiar characteristics. That we have a great reverence for the genius and character of Lord Beaconsfield we do not hesitate to confess; but we have no intention of writing a eulogium. Naught will assuredly be 'set down in malice,' and as certainly will naught be unreasonably 'extenuated.' As fully as our limits will permit, as graphically as our skill will allow, the life of him whom we believe to have been the greatest of modern statesmen—not even excepting Bismarck himself—will be told; and very

unskilfully indeed shall we have performed our task if the reader does not find in the narrative much both to interest, instruct, and stimulate; and if, in closing the volume, he does not feel with us that of a truth the departed statesman was one of those to whom no common gifts were lent, and of whom it can be emphatically said, 'This was a great man.'

CHAPTER II.

THE D'ISRAELI FAMILY.

'The Jews were looked upon in the middle ages as an accursed race, the enemies of God and man, the especial foes of Christianity. No one in those days paused to reflect that Christianity was founded by the Jews; that the Divine Author, in His human capacity, was a descendant of King David; that His doctrines avowedly were the completion, not the change, of Judaism; that the Apostles and the Evangelists, whose names men daily invoked, and whose volumes they embraced with reverence, were all Jews; that the infallible throne of Rome itself was established by a Jew; and that a Jew was the founder of the Christian churches of Asia.'—Preface to *Coningsby*.

THE family of which the late Lord Beaconsfield was the most distinguished member, was itself ancient, and, in more senses than one, illustrious. Few indeed of our nobility could trace back their ancestry so far as he, and on the career of few men have the traditions of race and descent had so marked an influence. The D'Israelis were, as the name itself declares, of the Hebrew race; and to Lord Beaconsfield's honour be it remembered he not only never sought to hide the fact, but gloried in it, and himself supplied the world with the particulars of his descent. Through the excellent biographical memoir prefixed to the edition of Isaac D'Israeli's works published in 1849, and other sources less authentic, the public have been made familiar with the origin of the D'Israeli family, and the circumstances under which it was transferred to the tolerant and genial abode where it has become so popular. When, four centuries ago, Spain was a far greater nation comparatively than she is now, many Hebrews, attracted by commercial pursuits, settled in the Spanish peninsula. Amongst the Jewish families who were resident in Spain in the fifteenth century was that from which the D'Israeli's sprung. It is probable they would have remained there but for the terrors of the Inquisition. When Torquemada, the terrible persecutor, entered upon his deadly crusade against unbelievers in Christ, when he sought to promote Christianity

by putting all non-Christians to death, the children of Israel, who had long lived and prospered 'on the shores of the Midland Ocean,' were compelled to flee for their lives. Reluctantly, we may be sure, and mournfully, they left their homes, and sought refuge where, though the skies were less sunny, there was an atmosphere of freedom. Some came to England, and some to Holland, while others, Lord Beaconsfield's ancestors amongst the number, turned their steps in the direction of the Venetian Republic. In their new settlement the family from which the illustrious statesman sprang dropped their 'Gothic' surname—what it was we are not told—and, 'grateful to the God of Jacob, who had sustained them through unprecedented trials, and guarded them through unheard of perils, they assumed the name of D'Israeli, a name never borne before or since by any other family.' In the quieter region of the Republic, safe from the fiery zeal of religious fanatics of the stamp of Torquemada, the D'Israeli's lived and flourished for two centuries or more. It was through the great-grandfather of Lord Beaconsfield, himself a merchant like the rest of his kinsmen, that a branch of the family was transplanted to British soil. About the middle of the eighteenth century the country emerged from a period of unusual excitement. In the religious world a consternation had been caused by the earnest efforts of Wesley and Whitfield, while the attention of the political world had been centred in the desperate but futile effort of the Young Pretender to seize upon the throne. The defeat and withdrawal of the Pretender settled the fate of the Stuarts, and left King George in undisputed possession. 'The dynasty seemed at length established,' and quiet succeeded for a while, like the calm after a storm. It was at this conjuncture, when the nation was in a peaceful and tolerant mood, when 'religious persecution,' with Pelham, who was favourable to the Jews, in power, seemed an impossibility, that Lord Beaconsfield's great-grandfather determined to send the youngest of his two sons to England. The name of this son was Benjamin, and soon after his settlement in this country he took up his abode at Enfield, in Middlesex.

The precise date of the migration of the ancestors of Lord Beaconsfield from Spain to Venice is not recorded; 'at the end of the fifteenth century,' Lord Beaconsfield somewhat vaguely fixes it; but as the persecution by Torquemada began in 1484, and continued some fourteen years, we may fix on 1495 as very nearly the date. John de Torquemada was the confessor of Queen Isabella, and he worked upon her superstitious nature to such an extent as to draw from her a pledge that, should she ever reign, heresy should be stamped out; and a terrible process that proved. On the Moors who remained in Granada after their brethren had been expelled by King Ferdinand, and on the unhappy Jews, the hand of the spiritual power fell with crushing weight. Neither age nor sex was spared if the charge of heresy was established; all were obliged to submit or perish. If they yielded, they were called in derision *Christianos Novos*, and were little more than permitted to exist, being looked down upon with scorn by other Christians, and persecuted by a social degradation almost worse to endure than actual torture or imprisonment. 'A general jealousy and suspicion took possession of all ranks of people; friendship and sociability were at an end. Brothers were afraid of brothers, and fathers of their children.' During that fourteen years, Torquemada, as Isaac D'Israeli notes in his article on the Inquisition,[1] is said to have prosecuted near eighty thousand persons, of whom six thousand were condemned to the flames. King Ferdinand, with the fierce fanatic Torquemada as agent, in short reduced Jews and Moors alike to a choice of alternatives—they must either conform and become good Catholics, fly the country, or perish at the stake. Many conformed, outwardly at least, many as we have seen perished, and many fled—the D'Israelis amongst the number. Of the history of the family during the two hundred years' residence in Venice little is preserved. The only career open to them would be commerce; and the pursuits of commerce though exciting enough to those immediately concerned, and important in their influence on the fortunes, both of individuals

[1] 'Curiosities of Literature,' edition 1824, vol. I, p. 292.

and of the state, offer little to attract the attention of the annalist or to gain the applause of the historian.

It was in the year 1749, four years after the suppression of the great invasion in favour of the exiled Stuarts, that the Benjamin D'Israeli who was destined to be the founder of the most illustrious branch of the family arrived in England, as Lord Beaconsfield notes in the memoir we have mentioned. The young Jewish immigrant—he was but eighteen—appears to have been a man of great natural talents for commerce, and of intense energy, and we may reasonably conclude that he did not land on our shores destitute either of influential connections or of commercial status. Neither would the branch of the family who had 'flourished as merchants' for so long a period in Venice, be likely to send out a cadet of the house unprovided for, or without the necessary capital to establish himself; and we may take it therefore that Benjamin D'Israeli was no penniless adventurer, but a youth fairly launched into the world, and with more than usual opportunities of succeeding. That he did succeed is a matter to admit of no dispute; and though the story of his having been offered the contract for a Russian loan is to be received with some caution, it is almost certain that he was never a 'poor' man in the ordinary acceptation of the term, while it is quite established that ere his death he was—even as we reckon fortunes now-a-days—a tolerably rich one.[1]

Either from accident, from temperament, or from a cautious desire not to cripple his commercial ventures by the cares and expenses of a family, Benjamin D'Israeli remained unmarried until his thirty-sixth year, when he was, in 1765, united to a lady who seems to have been chiefly remarkable for her beauty, and her detestation of everything which tended to remind her of her Jewish descent. In the introduction to his father's works, of which we have already spoken, Earl Beaconsfield thus alludes to her: 'My grandmother, the beautiful daughter of a family who had suffered much from persecution, had imbibed the dislike for her race which the vain are

[1] When his will was proved the personal estate was sworn under £35,000.—*Illustrated London News*.



spoken, Earl [illegible]

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[1] When his will was proved the personal estate was sworn under £35,000.—*Illustrated London News*.



too apt to adopt when they find they are born to public contempt.' It has, we think, been somewhat hastily asserted on the strength of this, and one or two other sentences, that the beautiful wife of the first of the English D'Israelis was a disbeliever in the faith of her people, but the evidence hardly goes so far as that. Though it is somewhat difficult to reconcile a dislike of everything Jewish with the conviction that the Jews were a chosen and peculiar people, yet experience shows us that many persons, while conceding to the Hebrews the honour of being the recipients of Revelation, yet act towards them as though they were some inferior or unworthy race—they receive with reverence the message, but omit no means of showing their contempt for those to whom the message was in the first instance delivered.

That Benjamin D'Israeli the elder was not by any means a man who scrupulously observed the ordinances of the Mosaic law and the ceremonials of the synagogue is pretty evident, but he was perhaps simply not zealous for, rather than antagonistic to, the faith of his fathers; and his attitude is, in all probability, pretty accurately described in Mr. Picciotto's remark that he 'did not take a great interest in synagogue matters.' Mr. D'Israeli was, we should fancy, more a man of the world than a religious enthusiast—keen, shrewd, striving and determined in business matters, but, apart from them, something of a man of pleasure in a quiet fashion. We can well understand that he might be liberal in his charities, and pay with cheerfulness his *finta*, or synagogue tax, which Mr. Picciotto tells us rose from 19s. per annum to £22 13s. 4d., and yet not care to accept office, or, when it was forced upon him, resign it at the earliest practicable moment. He tried for twelve months the duties of inspector of the charity school in connection with the Spanish synagogue in Bevis Marks, but that was the sum total of his official experiences. The Jewish merchant, after his retirement to Enfield, seems to have led a quiet, pleasant life, occupying himself with forming an Italian garden, and (his grandson tells us) playing whist with his friend Sir Horace Mann, 'who had

known his brother in Venice as a banker;' 'eating macaroni which was dressed by the Venetian Consul,' and otherwise making the best of a world which, except in respect to matrimonial happiness, must have been for him a very pleasant one.

Such, so far as his portrait has come down to us, was Benjamin D'Israeli, the father of Isaac D'Israeli, and grandfather of the late Lord Beaconsfield—and assuredly there was little in his career which would mark him out as an extraordinary man. Probably, indeed, the genius which in different aspects marked his two immediate descendants was inherited in no small degree from the mother's side; and the scornful and beautiful Jewess who disliked her race, who never pardoned her husband his name, and who we are afraid was not by any means the tenderest of mothers, may have transmitted, nevertheless, to her grandson that intense and determined spirit which marked him in all phases of his career, and which sustained him under difficulties that would have crushed a man of weaker fibre, or of less resolute character.

Isaac D'Israeli was born in May, 1766, at his father's residence at Enfield, and was in due course initiated by the usual rites into the Jewish faith. Of his early years we do not learn much. His education was at first of a somewhat scrambling and haphazard character. He attended a local school, at which he does not appear to have acquired a great deal, and he then was put under the hands of a private tutor. While yet young, however, he was sent to Amsterdam and Leyden, and here he received the greater part of the education he possessed. He learned modern languages pretty readily, but was not so successful in his classical studies. In truth, the tutors to whom he was committed cannot have been very exacting, and Isaac D'Israeli was suffered very much to study what he liked when once the regulation lessons were disposed of. Naturally enough the lad, left to himself, took up with the literary fashions of his day, and as all young people, and many old ones, were at the time crazy with admiration of Jean Jaques Rousseau and the writers of his school, Isaac D'Israeli became

a worshipper too. The craze was a natural one, but it had its natural result of making the young enthusiast behave ridiculously. On his return home he was received, not as he expected, with tender outbursts of sentimental affection on the part of his mother, but with outbursts of scarcely disguised laughter. The romantic youth had looked forward to this interview—the information is supplied by his son, and no doubt came originally from himself—and planned a meeting of 'sublime pathos.'

The shock to him was terrible, but we have no doubt it, as the phrase goes, 'did him good' by raising some suspicion in his mind that Jean Jaques was not quite the author on whose precepts life and behaviour should be modelled. He retired in lofty indignation to his apartment, and characteristically revenged himself by 'composing an impassioned epistle' and a poem. This last he is rumoured to have taken to Bolt Court with the intention of submitting it to Dr. Johnson, but the great lexicographer was then on his death-bed, and it is probable that the poem never reached him. Why Dr. Johnson, of all men, was selected as a peculiarly likely person to sympathise with a romantic youth brimming over with Rousseauism and wounded vanity we are not told, and it would be difficult to conjecture, unless we conclude, as one writer has done, that there was a certain identity of feeling; that 'the high church and Jacobite notions' of the doctor were closely in accordance with those of an admirer of the Hebrew theocracy.[1] At this time, however, Isaac D'Israeli's mind was in a ferment, and the impression that he was an unappreciated genius, though natural enough, did not conduce to either his own comfort or that of the family. His wish was to be an author—he in after days changed his opinions as to the delights attendant on the exercise of that craft—while his father was desirous that he should adopt a commercial career. The disagreement could not be accommodated, and the matter ended in Isaac being sent on

[1] He had, too, always a high opinion of Dr. Johnson. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December, 1786, will be found an essay occupying four pages, signed B. D'I., entitled 'Some Remarks on the Biographical Account of the late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., with an Attempt to Vindicate his Character from late Misrepresentation.'

a tour through France and Italy, during which he perfected himself in the French and Italian languages, and enlarged his acquaintance with the literature of both. He returned to England in 1788 with, it is recorded, 'some little knowledge of life, and a considerable quantity of books.'

By this time his father was convinced that Isaac had no ability suited to, nor any liking for, commercial pursuits, and the long struggle between father and son ended in the young man 'setting up' as an author, or rather, perhaps we should say, devoting himself to literature. In after years Isaac D'Israeli probably formed a truer estimate of the wish of his father to induce him to adopt commerce rather than literature, for we find him asking in the preface to his 'Calamities of Authors,' 'What affectionate parent would consent to see his son devote himself to his pen as a profession?' though against this we may fairly set another remark made by him when, referring to the treatment of Drayton, the author of 'Polyolbion,' by the booksellers, he says, 'Knavery has a strong connection with trade.' An author, however, Isaac D'Israeli was destined to become, and, on the whole, it was, we think, a fortunate thing for him that he could so content himself, for assuredly he was not a man to have fought his way to wealth and distinction in commercial pursuits. His was a quietly studious mind, and his amiable disposition predisposed him towards a life which did not bring him into rude conflict with an unsympathising world.

What was Isaac D'Israeli's first work it would be difficult to say. That he already dabbled in poetry we have seen, and there is reason to believe that he, amidst his literary studies and researches, found time to publish a number of fugitive pieces of poetry, one of which tradition says was spoken of highly by Sir Walter Scott. A contemporary writer[1] states, 'The earliest performance avowedly by Mr. D'Israeli is "A Poetical Epistle on the Abuse of Satire," which was written, we understand, to gratify a certain man of letters, who was his neighbour, and who smarted under the scourge of Peter

[1] 'Public Characters,' 1798 9, p. 489.

Pindar. As a first production it exhibits his poetical talents to considerable advantage. This effusion afterwards procured for him the friendship of Dr. Walcott, who not only encouraged his poetical efforts by unequivocal marks of his approbation, but conferred on him still more useful services, by many proofs of his friendship. In 1790, Mr. D'Israeli made a more formal appearance in public by addressing a poem, entitled "A Defence of Poetry," to the Laureate. The whole edition, excepting a few copies sold, was burnt by the author; undeservedly it seems, for the *Monthly Review* of March, 1791, gives him the following character: "Mr. D'Israeli is among the few modern poets who have attained their (the muses) favour; they appear from the testimony before us to have distinguished him from the crowd, and to have allowed him a plenteous draught from their fountain of inspiration. He is not without a knowledge of genuine poetry; his versification is elegant, flowing, and harmonious; nor can we read this specimen of his abilities without perceiving that he has devoted his days and his nights to our immortal Pope."'

That he was acquainted with Pye, the Poet-Laureate—the Pye of the well known line, 'Better be wrong with Pope than right with Pye'—is certain; but such an acquaintance would hardly lead to the conclusion that Isaac D'Israeli himself could possess much of the true poetical feeling. A man who had probably much more influence over his mind, and one who we have reason to suppose gave him the hint of his great work, 'The Curiosities of Literature,' was James Pettit Andrews; for D'Israeli, in the twelfth edition of his work, refers pointedly to Andrews' 'Anecdotes Ancient and Modern,' and to William Seward's 'Anecdotes of Distinguished Personages,' remarking 'these volumes were favourably received, and to such a degree that a wit of that day, and who is still a wit as well as a poet, considered that we were "far gone in our anecdotage."' He then goes on 'I conceived the idea of a collection of a different complexion. I was then seeking for instruction in modern literature and our language furnished no collection of *res*

litterariæ. In the diversified volumes of the French *Ana* I found materials to work on. I improved my subjects with as much of my own literature as my limited studies afforded. The volume without a name was left to its own unprotected condition.' This refers no doubt to the first volume, and we may take it as a proof that it was from Andrews' book that the original idea of a collection of literary anecdotes came into D'Israeli's mind. The work was almost immediately successful. The first volume, published in 1791, was in a few years followed by a second, and by a third in 1817. These three volumes went through many editions and gained in popularity, for we find the author stating in the preface to the edition of 1824, published by Murray, in three volumes, 'This work has proved useful; it has been reprinted abroad and it has been translated; and the honour which many writers at home have conferred on it, by referring to it, has exhilarated the zealous labour which frequent editions have necessarily exacted,'—a boast which seems to have been quite justified by the facts of the case. A second series of the 'Curiosities' was afterwards published in three volumes and became equally popular. The other literary works of Isaac D'Israeli were: 'Literary Miscellanies,' 'The Quarrels of Authors,' 'Calamities of Authors,' 'The Literary Character,' 'Character of James I.,' 'The Secret History of Charles I.,' 'Amenities of Authors,' 'Portraiture of Judaism,' and many others which will be found in the celebrated edition of his works. He also published an oriental tale, 'Mejnoun and Leila,' a story which is remarkable at least for the correctness of its delineations of costumes and manners whatever may be its merits as a narrative; and he issued too a 'Literary Romance,' of which he was subsequently, we believe, not particularly proud.

His fame rests, principally, on his 'Curiosities of Literature,' or at least that is the work by which he is most generally known and remembered. That it is a 'great' work we are not prepared to affirm, but it is one which had considerable influence on the literature of its day, and which will continue to be read with delight

so long as we have lovers of literary history amongst us. To produce such a work required a peculiar combination of qualities, and a combination which is not by any means usual. The extent of ground over which D'Israeli ranges is immense. The works of writers of all nations are laid under contribution, and the author never seems to look on any trouble as too great to be undertaken if only some point of interest can be elucidated. And with what gossiping ease are these stores of erudition laid before us. Though undoubtedly a man of almost immense acquirements, Isaac D'Israeli never obtrudes his learning or bores his readers. He gives one the impression of learned leisure desirous to instruct and amuse the passing hour, and so pleasantly does his pen stray on, that we are scarcely conscious that the results which are so chattily stated have only been reached by prolonged and careful investigations, and that the racy anecdote or curious passage is the one solitary grain of wheat which has been separated from many bushels of literary chaff. In all his works there is hardly a dull page, and it is indisputable that their general effect has been, what he himself states to have been their design, namely, to 'stimulate the literary curiosity of those who, with a taste for its tranquil pursuits, are impeded in their acquirements.[1]' The lovers of literature are naturally interested in the lives of men of letters, and D'Israeli, in his 'Quarrels of Authors' and 'Calamities of Authors,' has given what we may term the comedy and tragedy of professional authorship, just as in 'The Literary Character' he has essayed to, as far as possible define what is the peculiar combination of faculties which goes to make up that curious compound, an author.

One feature of Isaac D'Israeli's writings which we may also note is their wide spirit of charity and toleration. Whatever he may be he is not prejudiced. His leanings are in the direction of legitimacy, due subjection to authority and the established order of things, but they are never so pronounced as to sway his judgment. He can denounce oppression as heartily as the most rampant of

[1] Preface Ed. 'Curiosities of Literature,' 1824.

revolutionists, he abhors religious persecution, but dislikes, almost as much, disrespect to religious convictions; but he ever seems glad to escape altogether from these jarring elements into his favourite world of books, there to occupy himself with the calm examination of forgotten griefs, sorrows, and triumphs, and with curious searches into odd corners and byeways of history. It is a mark of Isaac D'Israeli's unprejudiced spirit that he was one of the first of our literary men to do something like justice to the characters of the first two Stuarts, and his acknowledgment of his mistaken estimate of the character of James is as honourable to him as a man as it is creditable to his industry as an investigator of the history of our country. In the earlier editions of the 'Curiosities of Literature' he, following the usual authorities, represented James in a most unfavourable light; but he added at the close of the article, 'I proposed to have examined with some care the works of James I., but that uninviting task has been now postponed till it is too late. As a writer his works may not be valuable, and are infected with the pedantry and superstition of the age; yet I *suspect* that James was not that degraded and feeble character in which he ranks by the contagious voice of criticism.' In the edition of 1824 he makes this further addition: 'This article, composed thirty years ago, displays the effects of first impressions and popular clamours,' and he then goes on to state how he has been undeceived, and to refer the reader to his 'Enquiry into the Literary and Political Character of James I,' as a 'corrective.' His 'Life of Charles I.' is a really important contribution to English history, and places the character of that maligned monarch in a light more favourable and much more just. For this work Isaac D'Israeli received from the University of Oxford the honorary degree of D.C.L. as a testimony of their respect; to use the language of the public orator—*optimi regis optimo defensori.* Isaac D'Israeli's work entitled 'Portraiture of Judaism' is now almost forgotten, except by those to whom the subject is of special interest; yet we are told by one well qualified to judge[1] that

[1] The late Dr. W. C. Taylor. See article in *Bentley's Miscellany* for March, 1848.

it is a production of 'singular merit,' and shews that D'Israeli was 'a diligent student' of Maimonides, Aben Ezra, Manasseh Ben Israel, and of Moses Mendelsohn—a recommendation which may be taken as decisive of the point of value of the work as a contribution to an unusually difficult and important controversy.

In this connection it will not be out of place if we glance at a feature in Isaac D'Israeli's life as to which there has been considerable controversy, namely, his acceptance or non-acceptance of the tenets of the religion of his race. This particular point has been patiently investigated by Mr. Picciotto,[1] who may be said to have gathered all the information available, and whose conclusions are now generally accepted. From Mr. Picciotto's researches it is evident that Isaac D'Israeli, though never a zealous member of the synagogue, was yet an occasional attendant at the place of worship of the Sephardim Jews in Bevis Marks, and was a rather liberal contributor to the various charities. With a view, perhaps, of stimulating his lagging zeal, the congregation in October, 1813, elected him Parnass or warden of the synagogue, an honour or a responsibility—it may be regarded as either or both—which Isaac D'Israeli refused to accept. The congregation insisted that he should discharge the duties, and an angry correspondence ensued, in the course of which we find D'Israeli writing as follows: 'A person who has lived out of the sphere of your observations—of retired habits of life—who can never unite in your public worship, because, as now conducted, it disturbs instead of exciting religious emotions—who has only tolerated some part of your ritual, willing to concede all he can on those matters which he holds to be indifferent; such a man with but a moderate portion of honour and understanding, never can attempt the solemn functions of an elder of your congregation, and involve his life and distract his business pursuits, not in temporary, but in permanent duties almost repulsive to his feelings.'

These words conclusively prove that Isaac D'Israeli was not by any means in accord in matters of doctrine with the majority of his

[1] 'Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History.' Trübner.

brethren, but they also show, we think, that he was not at the time they were written contemplating any separation from the Jewish communion as a body, for he tells his fellow Hebrews connected with Bevis Marks that he is 'willing to concede all he can on those matters which he holds to be indifferent,' which is hardly the expression that would be made use of by one to whom Judaism as a creed was mere superstition, or who regarded the worship of his fathers as an antiquated ceremonial. The congregational leaders were not, however, wise enough to let the matter drop. As Isaac D'Israeli would not serve, he was fined. The fines levied he refused to pay, and requested that his name should be struck out of the synagogue lists. So the matter stood for some four years, until 1821 in fact, when an arrangement was come to whereby Isaac D'Israeli paid a sum of £40 17s. as synagogue fees up to 1817, the fines were commuted, his name was formally taken off the congregational list, and he severed for ever his connection with the worship of his fathers. That this step was taken without much pain is not probable, but there can be little doubt that it was a wise one, for Isaac D'Israeli was in a false position when allied to an ecclesiastical organisation with which he had merely a sentimental or traditional sympathy.

Thus relieved from the trammels of a—to him—uncongenial church discipline, Isaac D'Israeli continued to live his own quiet and uneventful life, passing his days in his study or in conversation with men of letters, or in superintending the issue of fresh editions of his works. In 1841 a great misfortune, however, fell upon him, for he was stricken with partial blindness. This was a terrible affliction for a man of his peculiar turn of mind; but he found a loving amanuensis and assistant in his daughter Sarah, aided by whom he produced his 'Amenities of Literature,' and gave a final revision to his work on 'The Reign of Charles I.' He writes thus pathetically on his grievous deprivation, and the means by which it was made less afflicting: 'Amid this partial darkness I am not left without a distant hope nor a present emulation; and to *her* who has so

often lent me the light of her eyes, the intelligence of her voice, and the careful work of her hand, the author must ever "owe the debt immense" of paternal gratitude.' This daughter, Sarah D'Israeli, who died unmarried, was the eldest of the family and the right hand of her father in all his literary work, subsequent to his partial deprivation of sight. Isaac D'Israeli had married early in 1802, Maria, daughter of Mr. Joshua Basevi, an architect of some eminence, and had by her, in addition to the daughter already mentioned who was born in December, 1802, Benjamin (the late Earl of Beaconsfield), born 21st December, 1804; Ralph, born in 1809; and James, born in 1813. Mrs. D'Israeli does not appear to have been a woman in any way remarkable, but our information about her is of so scanty a nature that anything more than conjecture as to how far her influence moulded the character of her illustrious son is out of the question; possibly in the retirement of home the future Premier may have learned from his mother's lips stories of the past glories of his race; but though the picture of such a community of thought between mother and son would be attractive enough, it must be honestly confessed that there is no evidence that such an influence was exerted. For his father, Earl Beaconsfield, as a young man, always showed the greatest respect and veneration; and though it is a little premature chronologically, we may here quote a description given by an eye-witness of the father and son—D'Israeli the elder, and D'Israeli the younger—as they appeared together at Lady Blessington's: 'Two persons of different ages, and different appearance indeed, yet not without a strong mutual resemblance of feature. . . . The pair are Mr. D'Israeli the elder, and Mr. D'Israeli the younger; and Lady Blessington receives them both with conspicuous welcome. It was only the other day that her ladyship was mentioning to a visitor how delightful it was to witness the old man's pride in his clever young son, and the son's respect and affection for his father.' That this was no mere passing feeling, but one which had its roots deep down in his nature, the manner in which Benjamin Disraeli always spoke and wrote of his father abundantly proves; and the

deep respect which the son invariably manifested was, we believe, shared in by all who were familiar with the old gentleman's kindliness and geniality.

A personal friend of ours who, over forty years ago, resided in Buckinghamshire, and had the honour of frequent invitations from Isaac D'Israeli, speaks in feeling terms of the many excellent qualities which this sincere lover of literature possessed in a pre-eminent degree. He describes him as being an amiable and pleasant companion, and a man for whom no one who knew him could avoid entertaining feelings of admiration and esteem. The family always appeared a very happy one, and was a family remarkable for ability and culture, and one with which it was a pleasure as well as a privilege to associate, even in the slightest degree.

Our correspondent has favoured us with several reminiscences which it may not be uninteresting to reproduce. He says he remembers, one pleasant summer's evening, being invited by Isaac D'Israeli to play a game of chess with Benjamin, who was always a favourite with his father, as he was a favourite also with the rest of the family. Benjamin was a shrewd and cautious player; and our friend, dubious of his own abilities, was disposed at first to decline the invitation. But Mr. D'Israeli senior would hear of no excuse and the game therefore commenced — the old gentleman watching the competitors with considerable interest. The contest ended in favour of our correspondent, who, in answer to a question from Mr. D'Israeli as to how he had succeeded in obtaining the victory, replied that he had played a 'pawn' game. Benjamin, he said, had played with great men, with the large pieces, whilst he had played with the small ones, and their judicious use had enabled him to win,—an explanation which Mr. D'Israeli received with manifestations of interest and curiosity. Our correspondent was much struck on his visit with the deep reverence which the young D'Israeli invariably displayed for his father, and the love which the father showed for his handsome and promising son. Though Benjamin had not then made much headway in his political career,

had not won any notable position, or earned much fame, there was a firm conviction in the minds of his friends that he was destined to play no ordinary part in the political life of the future. Our correspondent recalls vividly a conversation he had with James Disraeli who was a great believer in the genius of his elder brother. They were speaking on political subjects, and incidentally, on a reference being made to Benjamin's opinions and prospects, James remarked with great emphasis that his brother had not only great ability but great confidence in his own powers; that he was nobly ambitious, earnest, and determined; and that, if they lived and he lived, they would have the pleasure of seeing him some day in positions of honour and distinction. Such recollections, truthful as we know them to be, are worth recalling as throwing light upon the happy home and the home influences which Benjamin Disraeli enjoyed—a happiness which Isaac D'Israeli did his best to create, and beneficial influences which, as a loving and an anxious father, he did his best to exercise.

An 'epidemic' to which his son alludes, and which caused the death of Isaac D'Israeli, was a severe attack of influenza, which, neglected at first, gained such headway as to prove fatal. Isaac D'Israeli died on January 19th, 1848, aged eighty-two years, at his seat at Bradenham House, Bucks, whither he had removed from Bloomsbury Square in 1825. A monument was in after years raised by Viscountess Beaconsfield to his memory, the site being a rising ground in the vicinity of Hughenden; and in the parish church of Bradenham there is also a memorial tablet which was erected by the family soon after his death. The personal appearance of the author of the 'Curiosities of Literature' may be judged from the graphic portrait which accompanies this work, etched, by kind permission of Messrs. G. Routledge & Sons, from the excellent steel engraving prefixed to their edition of Isaac D'Israeli's famous work. That the literary tastes and pursuits of Isaac D'Israeli influenced in a great degree the opinions, the social career, and even the political life of his illustrious son, is beyond dispute. How far they

did so, however, we will not here consider, as such an estimate will come more appropriately when we have to examine, as fairly and as thoroughly as possible, the intellectual growth of Benjamin Disraeli himself. That to understand the career of the late Lord Beaconsfield one must take into account the character of both his remote ancestors and of his immediate predecessor we are convinced, and that would be but a very superficial and one-sided estimate which left out of sight the circumstance that Benjamin Disraeli was, as he, half seriously and half jocularly, put the matter, 'born in a library,' and that his father was one of the leading literary celebrities of an age remarkable for intellectual activity, and for what we may term a revival of polite letters.

CHAPTER III.

BIRTH AND TRAINING.

'Do not suppose,' he added, smiling, 'that I hold that youth is genius; all that I say is that genius when young is divine.'—*Coningsby.*

BENJAMIN DISRAELI was born on the 21st of December, 1804: we give this date on the authority of Picciotto,[1] though there seems to have been a doubt on the subject, seeing that other books—'Lodge's Peerage' for instance—give it as 1805. The family of Isaac D'Israeli consisted, as we have already mentioned, of three sons and a daughter, and Benjamin was the oldest son. The place where he was born, is equally with the date of his birth, difficult to define. The fact is, his father, during the earlier period of his married life, several times changed his abode. He is said to have lived first in Adelphi; in 1809, he removed to King's Road; and subsequently, in order to be within easy distance of the British Museum, where, bookworm as he was, he loved to spend portions of his leisure, he took up his residence at the corner of Bloomsbury Square. It seemed probable that it was in the Adelphi that Benjamin Disraeli first saw the light, and this supposition is borne out by a statement to the same effect which he is said to have made to Lord Barrington a few days before his death. 'My father,' his lordship is reported to have said, 'was not rich when he married. He took a suite of apartments in the Adelphi, and, as he possessed a large collection of books, all the rooms were covered with them, including that in which I was born.' There may be other evidence in favour of the Adelphi with which we are unacquainted; but the point is, after all, by no means clear. It is well known that residents in Bloomsbury Square have for years past looked upon one of the

[1] 'Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History,' p. 300.

houses there as the late Earl's birthplace; and the tradition, if so it may be termed, remains to this day as much believed in as ever it was in the locality. Mr. Truefitt, of No. 5, Bloomsbury Square, in a letter recently published, states, 'When I took offices here, above five and twenty years ago, I was informed by those who had known the house for many years that Benjamin Disraeli was born in this house, and I have never since heard anything to cause me to doubt the believed fact.' But whatever part of the great city Disraeli may have been born in, it is clear that he was ushered into the world, amid remarkable surroundings: he was a native of no mean city, a member of a despised but remarkable race, and cradled in a library, for his father's house was crowded with books and papers. Around him were the evidences of greatness. If he looked, as a boy, outside his house, he saw what commercial enterprise and scientific skill had achieved; if he looked within at his father's well-filled shelves, he saw what genius and literary taste had accomplished. And there was he, a representative of a race subject to much ignominy, planted in the midst of a great people, with the wide world before him, to do battle with, and struggle through, under circumstances that were in many respects discouraging and disadvantageous.

That he was reared in the Jewish faith has been generally conceded. Mr. Picciotto states that he was, at the usual age of eight days, initiated into the covenant of Abraham by the hands of a relative, a merchant of high standing. The registry of the synagogue in Bevis Marks has since been searched and in it an entry discovered showing that Benjamin Disraeli, born on a Friday, 21 December, 1804 (Jewish date, 19 Tebet, 5565), was circumcised by D. A. Lindo, 26 Tebet, 5565; the attesting witness being D. J. De Castro. His father had however been gradually wavering in his adhesion to his ancestral faith, and on July 31, 1817, the youth was taken to St. Andrews, Holborn, and there baptized a Christian. The clergyman was the Rev. J. Thimbleby, and the entry in the register runs thus: 'Benjamin (said to be about twelve

years old), son of Isaac and Maria D'Israeli, King's road, gentleman.' Much has been written as to the religious opinions of Lord Beaconsfield, and it has been insinuated that if not a Jew in faith, he was a sceptic and unbeliever. It is true the Earl never made any plausible pretensions to piety. He took no conspicuous part in the work of any religious body, nor stood, like the Pharisee, in public places to display his religion that he might be seen and admired of men. He copied the more honourable though less showy part of the publican in the parable, and quietly, when at his Hughenden home, offered up his prayers in the little parish church, within whose precincts his body now lies. According to the testimony of the much respected Vicar of Hughenden, his lordship was a communicant, and doubtless a devoted member of the Church of England. That he took deep interest in the welfare of the church his whole life testifies; that he adopted her practices and followed her precepts is beyond a doubt. He set an example when at home of constant attendance to religious duties; and he gave evidence of his deep reverence for great truths by adopting them as the rule of his life and conduct. Of that charity which never faileth the Vicar of Hughenden has spoken; and what more do we need than the dying statement, 'I should like to live, but I am not afraid to die.' Let the Earl's critics, who profess greater piety than he, say whether they could truthfully and with a clear conscience make a similar asservation.

The school to which the youthful Disraeli was first sent was a ladies' school at Islington, kept by the two Miss Rapers. From thence he was sent to the Rev. Mr. Potticary, a Unitarian minister, who had opened a school at Elliott Place, Blackheath; and subsequently he was transferred to Walthamstowe, where he was placed under the tutorial care of Mr. Cogan.

Of Mr. Potticary we have not been able to learn much. He is said to have removed from Nottingham to Blackheath, but at what date we cannot ascertain. Inquiries have been courteously made for us in Nottingham, but no old residents have been met with who could recollect Mr. Potticary as a schoolmaster in the

borough. The probability is that he was but an usher in a Nottingham school before starting for himself at Blackheath. A correspondent who was Disraeli's schoolfellow at Blackheath in 1815 and 1816, says that he (Disraeli) did not shine as a learner, and he thinks he was removed to Mr. Cogan's in 1816. Mr. Cogan we know to have been an accomplished scholar and an excellent man. At his academy Disraeli was entered as a parlour boarder, and remained there about four years, leaving in 1820. Of his school life during this period we have attempted to obtain some details, and, with this view, we communicated with Mr. Samuel Woods, of Mickleham, Surrey, who was one of Disraeli's schoolfellows. Mr. Woods, whose courtesy we desire gratefully to acknowledge, has supplied us with the following interesting details: Disraeli's great crony was a very nice fellow about his own age, named Moses Sarquay, of Hebrew extraction, of Jamaica, a universal favourite, and also a parlour boarder, who came early to an untimely end by drowning on the Jamaica coast. Disraeli had, Miss Cogan states, a wonderful faculty for relating stories, often of a marvellous kind, and with them entertained his bedroom mates frequently to their wrapt delight. As one of the younger boys—Mr. Woods entering at eleven, and Disraeli being then fifteen—they did not sleep in the same room. His impression is that Disraeli never came up to Mr. Cogan's standard in his classics; that he was somewhat careless in the preparation of his lessons, but that quickness of apprehension and an excellent memory often enabled him to regain a lost place in his class, thus rivalling some very clever lads who were his more studious competitors. Among the latter were his friend Sarquay, whom we have already mentioned; the two Strattons—the younger, Thomas, took a double first, and became a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge; Russell Gurney, and some others.

It is a noticeable fact that in two of Disraeli's early novels references to school fights are introduced; and in 'Contarini Fleming' especially, a portrait is painted of an oppressed boy exacting a terrible punishment from his oppressor. Comments of a severely critical

nature have been made by some writers on the character of Disraeli's school days. We are glad to be able to assure the reader that whatever 'Contarini Fleming' may be—however merciless and revengeful—he cannot justly be regarded as in any sense a counterpart of the boy Disraeli. In this respect there is nothing autobiographical in the novel, as the recollections with which we have been favoured will show. Mrs. Filliter, eldest daughter of the late Mr. Cogan, writing to Mr. Woods, says, 'My recollections of Disraeli are not numerous. I remember him chiefly as a clever talking lad at the parlour boarders' tea-table, where I generally presided. I feel convinced that he was not of a revengeful disposition, at least I never heard this alleged of him in those early days;' while Mr. Woods assures us that, though at times he may have seemed somewhat overbearing towards his juniors, he was certainly neither pugnacious nor revengeful.

Of his boyhood we have, but for these reminiscences, somewhat scant information. No one has preserved for us any of the class of anecdotes which are usually forthcoming on the death of distinguished men. The evidence shows that young Disraeli differed in no material respect from the rest of the scholars. There was nothing in his appearance or prospects to make him a centre of attraction. He was, though reserved, and perhaps not over industrious, a sharp, intelligent, interesting, plucky boy, but such boys are not uncommon in our schools. Had he been the heir to a barony, his juvenile exploits might have been noted as worthy of observation and remembrance. But he was only the son of a London gentleman of substantial means, with no alluring prospects and no distinguished connexions; untrammelled by vast wealth, or the dignity of a great name. If he differed at all from his companions, it was in his Jewish descent, in his graceful deportment, and in his pleasing appearance. His Jewish origin may have drawn upon him the sneers of his schoolfellows, and made him the butt of boyish ridicule. We have no evidence that it did, though some writers appear to believe that the rebuffs he would have to endure helped

to develop his combative powers. It must be borne in mind that Disraeli was not ashamed of his descent, as some have ignorantly insinuated. On the contrary, he could see a great deal to be proud of. If he looked through the pages of history he could single out the names of noble Jews, who had shaped and guided the destinies of nations. 'You never observe,' he once proudly wrote, 'a great intellectual movement in Europe in which the Jews do not greatly participate.' Trained to appreciate the intellectual greatness of his race, young Disraeli was scarcely likely to be deeply affected by any references to his Judaism. His combativeness, such as it was, formed part of his nature. It arose from an intense desire never to be beaten. He struggled with opponents and with discouragements that he might gain the mastery. The timid word 'can't' he dismissed from his vocabulary. With him it was ever 'shall' and 'will.' 'I have begun,' said he, on a memorable occasion, 'several times many things, and have *often succeeded at last.*'

Leaving school with a mind well stored, and fired with a laudable desire to excel, the youth began, with his father's assistance, to try to shape his future career. He was of too active and earnest a temperament to desire a quiet life. He had no wish to pass his time in the discharge of the unostentatious duties of a private gentleman. He desired a wider sphere of action. 'I should like,' he doubtless said to himself, in the words of Coningsby, 'to be a great man.' All his contemporaries, and those especially who knew him best in his early days, have borne witness to his natural ambition; his unconquerable determination to work his way to the front. He was bent on making a creditable name, and on doing great deeds. The question was, what course would be best to pursue? Of the great professions, which would be the wisest to follow? After due consideration preference was given to the law, and in 1821 young Disraeli was apprenticed to Mr. William Stevens, solicitor, a member of the eminent firm of Swain, Stevens, and Co. The articles of clerkship are still preserved. They bear date 10th November, 1821, and are between Isaac D'Israeli, Esquire, of Bloomsbury

Square, Benjamin D'Israeli his son, and William Stevens, solicitor, Frederick Place, whereby the son is placed for five years as clerk, etc., to learn the legal profession, and to become an attorney of the Court of King's Bench, and a solicitor of the Court of Chancery. The selection of this excellent office as the school wherein young Disraeli was to learn the law arose through the fact that Mr. Maples, one of the partners in the firm, was a friend of Isaac D'Israeli. When Benjamin entered upon his duties, he was placed in the department over which Mr. Maples presided, and the *Solicitors' Journal* says 'Mr. Maples always described Mr. Disraeli as being most assiduous in his attention to business, and as showing great ability in its transaction.' A correspondent of the *Law Times* says, 'I have had papers pass through my hands showing that he did the usual routine, for they were endorsed, "served copy on clerk on date.—B. D'I."' But ere he was out of his teens, his ideas underwent a change. His opinion of the legal profession altered. He did not consider it suited to his tastes, nor did he see in it that scope for his abilities which he ardently desired. In 'Vivian Gray' he thus soliloquises: 'The bar; pish! law and bad jokes till we are forty, and then, with the most brilliant success, the prospect of gout and a coronet. Besides, to succeed as an advocate I must be a great lawyer, and to be a great lawyer I must give up my chance of being a great man.' Accordingly, he quitted the bar in favour of literature and politics, and in so doing he acted wisely and well. He found a sphere congenial to his tastes, and for which nature had pre-eminently fitted him.

At what period of his life Benjamin Disraeli became an author it is impossible to say. As a youth he probably wrote a vast amount of prose and of verse, which was never fated to see the light, but we know also that he wrote a good many slight and fugitive pieces which were published in the various ephemeral magazines, journals, and albums which were then fashionable. Possibly, also, he wrote on politics, but if so his lucubrations were never recognised by himself in his more mature years. It has been asserted

that young Disraeli was at one time a contributor to the newspaper press. The *Star Chamber* and the *Representative* are the two journals with which his name has been associated. The first-named existed about two months, and Disraeli's connection with it has been assumed from the nature and style of the articles. The *Representative* was started by Murray, and Disraeli has been mentioned, not only as a contributor to its columns, but as one who assisted in its establishment. Many respectable authorities have given currency to the story. It is mentioned in an article in the *London Magazine* for September, 1826. Reference was made to it a few years later in the *Edinburgh Review;* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, noticing the death of Isaac D'Israeli, attributed the coolness which arose in their later years between Murray and the author of the 'Curiosities of Literature' to a squabble arising out of the young Disraeli's connection with the *Representative*. There is, however, the best possible evidence that Benjamin Disraeli had no connection with the paper—which, by the way, had not a very prolonged existence, the first number being published on January 25, 1826, and the last in July of the same year. In his brief 'Life of Benjamin Disraeli,' published some years ago, Mr. M'Gilchrist effectually exposed the inaccuracy of the rumour.[1] In the year 1861, says Mr. M'Gilchrist, a man of letters, named Mr. J. J. Shehan, was preparing a 'History and Topography of Buckinghamshire,' which was subsequently published by Messrs. Longmans. In his notice of the topographical, historical, and biographical associations of that part of the county in which Mr. Disraeli resides, he naturally made reference to the Disraeli family and the career of Benjamin Disraeli himself. Before sending this portion of his manuscript to the press he submitted a transcript of it to Mr. Disraeli, begging that any necessary corrections might be introduced. He received the following reply, which is characteristic of the writer: 'I have made no additions, and have only taken the liberty of correcting and condensing what you have so obligingly said of myself. I have made it a rule throughout life never to

[1] 'The Life of Benjamin Disraeli,' by John M'Gilchrist. Cassell, Petter & Galpin. P. 11.

attempt to correct a misstatement respecting myself, provided it did not impugn my honour; but when utterly erroneous statements are submitted for my sanction I hope there is no egotism in my presuming to correct them; as, for example, the constantly repeated story of a newspaper called the *Representative*, in which I never wrote a single line, and never was asked to write a single line.' This letter, which is dated Sept. 23rd, 1861, thus finally disposes of the *Representative* story, and of course disposes also of the sneers in which some of the biographers of Mr. Disraeli have indulged at the 'flippant and dogmatic' tone of some of the articles which he was so very gratuitously supposed to have contributed to that journal. It may be doubtful whether or no he was ever actually engaged as a political writer on the newspaper press; but we have it on undoubted authority that he had sought to be engaged in that capacity—the authority of one who had the editorial charge of a London daily paper at about the time of Disraeli throwing up his clerkship with the respectable firm of attorneys he was serving, assuring us that he had a formal application for employment from the youthful aspirant for political journalism, and which he always most deeply regretted—as well he might—that it had not been in his power to give him.

Fortunately, if not a contributor to the newspapers, his literary powers were not destined to lie dormant or unacknowledged.

Young Disraeli—for we may henceforward invariably adopt the spelling which he himself used—in 1826, burst upon the world with his first, and perhaps we may also say, his best known novel, 'Vivian Grey,' and a tremendous sensation that work made. Before dealing with this extraordinary production, most of which was, it is alleged, written ere the author had attained his twentieth year, it will be as well to glance at the political and social aspects of the time, and indicate the sort of world amidst which the young novelist moved, and from which he drew the characters, and some of the incidents of his work. George IV. was on the throne, and the struggle between old Toryism, as represented by Lord Eldon, and the new

school, represented by Mr. Canning, was in full progress. The year 1825 had, according to official accounts, opened auspiciously. The speech from the throne stated that 'There never was a period in British history when the people were so thriving and contented,' but those words must have been the expression of some very sanguine mind. There were, as usual, great disturbances in Ireland, and O'Connell was conducting his Catholic Emancipation campaign by the aid of the Catholic associations. The reform party were most active in England; and though 'Prosperity Robinson' had laid before the House a satisfactory Budget, there were not wanting those who did not hesitate to declare their conviction that the commercial prosperity of the country was but skin deep. These misgivings were justified by events. Parliament had scarcely risen when a commercial and money panic set in. Several of the London and provincial banks went down with a crash, and an Order in Council had to be made authorising a temporary issue of one pound notes, and an extraordinary emission of sovereigns from the Mint. The sufferings of the people were great, and the outcry against the Corn Laws grew so fierce and persistent that, early in the session of 1826, Mr. Canning introduced two measures: one for the admission of bonded corn upon the payment of a certain duty, and the other for allowing ministers the power of admitting a limited quantity of foreign grain. These measures, and the attitude of the ministry in regard to Portugal, had raised Mr. Canning to a great height of popularity, and almost justified the exclamation that at the close of 1826 'the popularity of George Canning was unbounded.' In 1827 the Catholic question again came to the front, and the failing health of Lord Liverpool made the question one which of necessity would, in the immediate future, influence the formation of the Cabinet, and, it was hoped by his friends, place Mr. Canning in power as Premier.

It will thus be seen that 1826, the year in which 'Vivian Grey' was published, was one in which party spirit necessarily ran very high, and that the struggles of the past would naturally be regarded

by all political bodies as indicating with more or less directness and clearness the victories or defeats of the future. Socially there has hardly been a more brilliant era in English history, and though, as we have seen, the position of the great bulk of the people was one which could only officially be regarded as satisfactory, there was in society all the movement, brilliancy, and profusion, which attend a period of national prosperity. Amongst the most prominent of the striking social personages of the time was the lady in whose *salons* young Disraeli had made his *debût* in society—the well known Countess of Blessington. It has been insinuated that the drawing-room of this once celebrated and talented lady had an unfavourable influence on the mind of young Disraeli; that he there learned a cynical philosophy which distinctly lowered his moral tone; that he there imbibed a love of rank and of position which incapacitated him from sympathising with the aspirations of the people, and that a society so frivolous, so false, so glittering, so insincere, and so heartlessly selfish, had the effect of developing that ostentation, insincerity, and want of earnestness, which Lord Beaconsfield's political opponents charged against him to the last hour of his life. The impossibility of drawing an indictment against a nation is proverbial, to draw an indictment against a section of society is at least equally hazardous. That amongst the brilliant crowds who filled the *salons* of the Countess of Blessington there were cynical, selfish, and heartless men and women is more than likely; but it is absurd to affirm that all were so, and even more absurd to conclude that all who mixed with this intellectual and polished society of necessity imbibed the false sentiments and the odious vices with which ignorance has credited it. The Countess of Blessington could hardly, by the most charitable, be held to have pursued throughout her life a course either altogether prudent or altogether becoming; but it may very strongly be suspected that she was one 'more sinned against than sinning,' and that while her faults were many her virtues and her talents outnumbered them. That she and her friends powerfully influenced young Disraeli is almost certain; but so she and her friends

influenced another young man of genius, Lord Byron; and yet, so far as we are aware, no biographer has thought it necessary to make, as it were, certain of his lordship's youthful insincerity, and cynicism, and heartlessness, by referring them to his acquaintance with Lady Blessington, and less directly with Count D'Orsay. The fact of the matter is, that Lady Blessington's *salon* was the meeting-place of many of the clever and brilliant men of the day. She was herself a woman of no mean talent; and assuredly, spite of her own shortcomings, not a woman who would be likely to corrupt the minds of those with whom she was brought in contact. She was married ere she was fifteen to an Irish gentleman. This was in September, 1789; and in February, 1818, she became the wife of the Earl of Blessington, with whom she lived for some years on the Continent. On his death she returned to England, and was one of the leading figures in London society, living first in Berkeley Square, and afterwards at Gore House. She was a voluminous writer, and some of her works deserve to be more generally known. She edited, if we may use the term, the well-known 'Book of Beauty,' for seven or eight years, and was the friend of nearly every literary man of eminence of her time, including the Disraelis, father and son. That she was something more than the 'Bohemian' which she has been described is evident from the notices of the more distinguished of her contemporaries and the comments of the press. Thus, in recording her death, which took place in Paris in 1849, the *Gentleman's Magazine* observes: 'Of her writings it may be truly said that they are eminently dictated by right feeling, and her novels always presented a highly refined idea of female character.' The *Morning Post* wrote: 'She was loved and admired by all who had the happy privilege of knowing her, and of joining in those social circles of the witty and the wise who congregated round her hospitable board.' The *Illustrated London News* remarked: 'Her life was passed in the society of the most eminent in intellect and rank. Her beauty, her taste, and her fascinating manners have been the theme of hundreds of writers, and the talk of Europe.' The *Athenæum*

speaks of 'her life of unselfish good offices and lively social intercourse.' The *Examiner* records that 'she was never so happy as when doing generous acts:' and adds, 'her house at Kensington Gore was for fourteen years the resort of the most distinguished men of wit and genius of every country.' And a French critic thus expresses his opinion:[1] '*Esprit vif et delicat, organisation fine et distinguée . . . Ses ouvres sont dans l'acceptation du mot, de vrais romans de societé, leur philosophie est celle du grande monde. On sent, dans les lisant, que l'ecrivain a vu penser et agir sous les yeux les personages qu'il represente. Aucun livre n'est plus propre à donner une idée juste de ca qu'a été au dix-neuvieme siècle la societé aristocratique de la Grande Bretagne.*' Were further testimony needed to the worth of this much calumniated lady, we might quote Mr. Procter's (Barry Cornwall) testimony to her 'kind and generous heart;' but we have probably said enough to show that it was no drawback, but rather a great and manifest advantage to young Disraeli that he should have had at the outset of his career an entry into society so brilliant, and the friendship of a woman so generous, so polished, so kind-hearted, and—spite of her own failings—with so high an idea of the true dignity of her sex. We perhaps owe it to her in some degree that Mr. Disraeli has, amidst all the sarcastic sallies, and the keenly satirical flashes of his early novels, always held up a high ideal of female character, and rated so highly female influence.

Amongst the many celebrated men who were visitors at the Countess of Blessington's, and with whom Disraeli associated, if not as yet on terms of equality, yet on a footing of generous appreciation, were the two Bulwers—the novelist and statesman Edward, and the diplomatist Henry; James Smith (of 'Rejected Addresses'), Lord Byron, Tom Moore, the Duke de Richelieu, Gortschakoff, then Secretary to the Russian Embassy, and numberless others. Of a truth, to have moved in such society must in itself have been 'a liberal education,' and we may be sure that Disraeli availed himself of his advantages to the uttermost.

[1] *Biographie Universelle Nouvelle.*

In 1824–25 young Disraeli made a rather extended tour on the continent, and would appear especially to have travelled in Germany, or resided for a short time at some of the minor courts. His journeyings, unfortunately, have not been recorded, but we can well imagine that so keen an observer did not go through even the common experience of a continental tour without learning much. On his return from this journey—or one of them, for it is not quite clear whether or no two visits were not paid to the continent about this date—young Disraeli found himself famous. He had published 'Vivian Grey,' and the novel had taken immensely. Its cleverness, its arrogance, its personalities, its thinly-disguised portraits of living celebrities, and its wit, had hit the taste of the hour, and society was excited as to its possible author. That it was the work of the younger Disraeli was soon an open secret, and the clever young writer became the 'lion' of the London season. Looking back now-a-days at the book, and reading it carefully, it is somewhat difficult to discover what it was which procured for it so wide a popularity, and for its author so immediate a notoriety. But when we remember that, inflated, stilted, and artificial as is its style in many places, and absolutely absurd as are some of the incidents related, it was an entirely original form of novel, that it was a sketch of men and women well known, and that to the readers of that generation many phrases which now seem meaningless carried an esoteric meaning, or conveyed an allusion the point of which was immediately detected, we may form some idea of what it was in 'Vivian Grey' which set our fathers and grandfathers agog with curiosity and excitement.

To affirm that 'Vivian Grey' is a great novel would be too much, but it may without fear of contradiction be asserted that it is a wonderful novel to have been written by a lad of twenty. Lord Beaconsfield in his maturer years was not desirous that 'Vivian Grey' should be republished in the collected edition of his works, but circumstances were too strong for his lordship, and as it was impossible that it could be suppressed, the author adopted we think a correct course

when he resolved that it should go forth once more to the world under the sanction of his name. His lordship, however, was as keenly conscious of the defects of this his first novel as the most severe of his censors, and in the preface expressed a hope that the work 'would be read with an indulgent recollection of the conditions under which it was produced.'

It is in that spirit that we purpose to sketch lightly some of the leading incidents in the novel, endeavouring at the same time to show that, even thus early, Disraeli demonstrated that he possessed not only keen powers of observation and a satirical bent of mind, but also that he had studied men and manners closely, and had formed a pretty accurate estimate of the value of that brilliant delusion termed society. It has been claimed for 'Vivian Grey' that it contains much of the author's political creed, and that in it may be found the hints of his future career. To some extent this is true, but only in a very limited sense: to cite a passage of 'Vivian Grey' as a proof that its author held such and such political theories is as absurd as it would be to quote a passage from 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers' as a proof that Lord Byron did not appreciate Scott. The hasty expression of opinions by a clever youth must, in all fairness, be taken with indulgent reservations in favour of more matured convictions. Young Disraeli wrote probably much for the sake of effect, and much more from thoughtlessness, and on the impulse of the moment; and a considerable portion of the cynicism which he indulged in may be set down to mere affectation. Nor do we think the worse of him for it. Cynicism and man-of-the-worldism, if we may use the phrase, were the affectations of his day, as 'culture' and 'high art' are the affectations of our own; and all the clever young men of the period 'went in' for the sarcastic and the bitter, as the gilded youth of our own epoch 'go in' for enthusiasm of the 'quite too utter' and 'consummate' school.

Vivian Grey is an only child, brought up by a father too deeply immersed in literary pursuits to give much attention to the details of his son's education. Mr. Grey's parental duties, we are told in

the opening chapter, 'were confined to giving his son a daily glass of claret, pulling his ears with all the awkwardness of literary affection, and trusting to God that "the urchin would never scribble."' The boy is sent to school to Dr. Flummery's, and then passes under the care of a tutor, a Mr. Dallas. The sketches of his school days and of his fellow-pupils are clever and amusing; and the feud between Vivian and one of the ushers named Mallett is told with considerable humour. A schoolboy scrape leads to his expulsion; and he then commences at home a course of severe study, which enables him in the space of twelve months, or thereabouts, to discourse learnedly on 'the later Platonists.' Declining to go to college, the youth turns his attention to politics; and the author, sketching probably in this from his own experience, details to us with some minuteness the course of the reflections with which the hero amused his solitude and animated his ambition. He ponders on his future career, and thus estimates the paths to fame open to him: 'The Bar—pish! law and bad jokes till we are forty, and then, with the most brilliant success, the prospect of gout and a coronet. . . . The Services in war time are only fit for desperadoes (and that truly am I), but in peace they are fit only for fools. The church is more rational—let me see; I should certainly like to act Wolsey, but the thousand and one chances against me! And truly I feel my destiny should not be on a chance! Were I the son of a millionaire or a noble, I might have all. Curse on my lot! that the want of a few rascal counters, and the possession of a little rascal blood, should mar my fortune!' At length Vivian Grey hits on what he conceives to be 'the grand discovery:' '"*Riches are power*," says the economist; and "is not *Intellect?*" asks the philosopher. And yet while the influence of the millionaire is instantly felt in all classes of society, how is it that the "noble mind" so often leaves us unknown and unhonoured? Why have there been statesmen who have never ruled, and heroes who have never conquered? Why have glorious philosophers died in a garret? and why have there been poets whose only admirer has been nature in her echoes? It must be that these beings have

thought only of themselves, and, constant and elaborate students of their own glorious natures, have forgotten or disdained the study of all others. Yes! we must mix with the herd; we must enter into their feelings; we must humour their weaknesses; we must sympathise with the sorrows we do not feel, and share the merriment of fools. Oh yes! to rule men we must be men; to prove that we are strong we must be weak; to prove that we are giants we must be dwarfs, even as the Eastern Genie was hid in the charmed bottle. Our wisdom must be concealed under folly, and our constancy under caprice. . . . Mankind then is my great game. At this moment how many a powerful noble wants only wit to be a minister, and what wants Vivian Grey to attain the same end?—that noble's influence. When two persons can so materially assist each other why should they not be brought together? . . . There wants but one thing more—courage, pure perfect courage; and does Vivian Grey know fear? He laughed an answer of bitterest derision.'

It is impossible of course to read a passage like the above, and not to realise that in it we have, to some extent, the feelings which Mr. Disraeli entertained. The ambitious projects were no doubt his own, and the daring to execute them was indisputably his also. But we are not prepared to accept the theory that here we have a sketch of a definitely conceived purpose which was afterwards carried out, or to agree to the assertion that Mr. Disraeli must have been as coolly calculating as he represents his hero to have been. There is as much due to the literary artist in the composition of this graphic picture of the musings of a clever and ambitious youth, as to the self-examination of a cynic; and, while we regard the passage as indicative of the bent of the author's mind, and the direction of his ambition, we must not hastily conclude that it is a piece of autobiography to be accepted as wholly true and definitely accurate. In pursuance of the policy which he has determined on, Vivian Grey looks round for the powerful noble whose influence, supplemented by Grey's genius, is to accomplish these wonderful results, and fixes on the Marquis of Carabas—a politician who is

sketched with amusing cleverness. He is represented as 'servile and pompous, and indefatigable and loquacious;' a man of much influence by reason of his great wealth and his command of rotten boroughs, but one whom the ministry have somewhat neglected—not because they do not know his power, but because they conceive themselves possessed of so strong a majority that they can do without his help. Instigated by the audacious Vivian Grey, the marquis endeavours to form a party, of which he is to be the head. The progress of the negotiations to that end is sketched with much sarcastic humour, though there are scenes of almost ludicrous improbability; a crowd of characters is introduced in the working out of the political plot, and so cleverly are many of them sketched that the reader half forgets the absurdity of the situations. What gave piquancy, however, to the novel at the time was that nearly all these pictures were identified by the laughing world as caricatures of living celebrities. Thus, the Marquis of Carabas was affirmed to be the Marquis of Clanricarde; Fitzborn, Sir R. Peel; Foaming Fudge, Mr. Brougham; Charlatan Gas, Mr. Canning; Lord Past Century, Lord Eldon; Lord Prima Donna, Lord William Lennox; Stanislaus Hoax, Theodore Hook; Mrs. Felix Lorraine, Lady Caroline Lamb; Mrs. Million, Mrs. Coutts; M. of Almacks, the Marchioness of Londonderry; and Prince Xtmnpqrtosklw, Gortschakoff, then secretary to the Russian Embassy. The political plot goes on for a time swimmingly; Mr. Cleveland, a retired and soured politician, accepts the leadership in the Commons of the proposed new party, and the Marquis of Carabas and his friends count confidently on humiliating the minister who has dared to neglect them. The charm of the novel, however, lies not so much in the plot as in the flashes of satirical humour, the keen hits at personal foibles, and the amusing conversations in which the weaknesses of dukes, marquises, and great people generally, are cleverly 'shown up.' Nor do meaner persons escape. 'Mr. Stapylton Toad' is a sketch which is so true to life that the world at once found half a dozen originals of the portrait. Mr. Toad, we are

told, 'had not the honour of being acquainted with his father's name; but, as the son found himself at an early age apprenticed to a solicitor of eminence, he was of opinion that his parent must have been respectable.' On completing his articles, Mr. Toad starts in life on his own account; but, to all appearance, does little or no business. Soon, however, the solitary clerk of his struggling days finds fellows, and Toad shows signs of flourishing. His brother practitioners are puzzled; but old city scholars shake their heads, and mutter of 'money business,' and 'odd work in annuities.' More and more pronounced, however, become the tokens of Toad's success; and he moves to Cavendish Square. 'The new residence of Mr. Toad,' remarks the author drily, 'had previously been the mansion of a noble client, and one whom, as the world said, Mr. Toad "had got out of difficulties." This significant phrase will probably throw some light upon the nature of the business of our mysterious practitioner. Noble lords who have been in difficulties will not much wonder at the prosperity of those who get them out.' A similar windfall from another noble client, and Mr. Toad purchases an estate in Surrey; goes into parliament, and moves in the highest circles, universally respected—at least so far as outward signs go—but in fact the laughing-stock of the elegant multitude into which he has, by wily and crooked means, managed to thrust himself. The whole sketch is a stinging satire on the career of a class common enough in large cities, namely, men who have risen by means which few can accurately trace, but which all instinctively feel to have been objectionable.

Scarcely less amusingly satirical are many others of the character sketches in 'Vivian Grey,' and nearly all of them show a wonderful knowledge of the world for so young a man as Mr. Disraeli was at that time. But, to proceed with our remarks on the plot: The intrigues of Vivian Grey and the Marquis of Carabas are betrayed by Mrs. Felix Lorraine; and there is a terrible scandal. Cleveland insults Grey. The two meet, and fight a duel, in which Cleveland is shot dead; and Vivian Grey, after nearly losing his life by a brain

fever, flies to the continent. Here we are introduced to a new set of characters, pourtrayed with equal cleverness and equally as amusing as those in the first part of the novel; though probably the best 'work,' in a literary sense, may be found amongst the many fine descriptions of scenery in which the book abounds, marred though they may sometimes be with passages of what is little better than rant, or what Gifford called 'fustian.' Vivian Grey's adventures on the continent are as astounding as those which he has already gone through. He saves a young nobleman from ruin by exposing the rogueries of a gang of aristocratic card sharpers; he falls in love with a beautiful young Irish lady, Violet Fane, who dies in his arms after the declaration of a mutual passion; and then he flies once more, reckless whither he goes, so that he escapes from the scene of so much happiness and of so much misery. Wandering in the forest, he is benighted, but his faithful servant, Essper George, discovers a light, towards which they make their way. They find a castle, into which they are admitted, and receive a hearty but very extraordinary welcome. The castle is that of the Grand Duke of Johannisberger, and he and some half dozen of his friends are engaged in an elaborate drinking bout, in which Grey is compelled to join. After a somewhat absurd and extravagant scene, Vivian Grey and his servant escape, and travel forward hoping to find some public highway. They encounter the hunting party of the Prince of Little Lilliput—whom, be it noted, the gossips of the day identified with Prince Leopold, afterwards King of the Belgians—and Vivian is fortunate enough to save the prince from the attack of a wild boar. He is thereupon taken as a guest to the palace, and is soon high in the confidence of the prince himself. With much extravagant humour the puerile pomp of a petty German court is described, and we are initiated into a series of intrigues which culminate in a secret visit, paid by the prince—journeying as Herr Von Philipson—and Vivian Grey, to Herr Beckendorff (Metternich), the eccentric Prime Minister of the Grand Duke of Reisenburg.

Their adventures here are as amusing and extraordinary as

usual, and in the end the Prince of Little Lilliput comes to the court of the Grand Duke of Reisenburg, whither Vivian had preceded him by a few days. In the midst of the rejoicings and festivities, an Austrian archduchess comes on a visit *incognita*. She has, for diplomatic reasons, been betrothed to the Crown Prince of Reisenburg, whom she has never met, and makes the journey in order, if possible, to win the prince's affections ere he discovers that she is his covenanted wife. Unfortunately the lady is disgusted with the manners and appearance of the prince, but is much taken by the many accomplishments of the all-conquering Vivian Grey. This, to the State, very inconvenient attachment is discovered by the Minister Beckendorff; and once more Vivian Grey, attended by the faithful Essper George, sets forth on his wanderings, his avowed purpose being to reach Vienna. On his journey, however, he is benighted in a Bohemian forest. A thunderstorm of terrific violence bursts on his devoted head; the rising waters of the swollen mountain cataracts hem him in; a flash of lightning kills his horse;—and then the story breaks off abruptly. We are told, in a short and mysterious paragraph, that Vivian reached Vienna; and the novel closes with the oracular words: 'The disappointment of manhood succeeds to the delusion of youth; let us hope that the heritage of old age is not despair.'

From the brief sketch that we have given the reader will perceive that 'Vivian Grey' is a production of the most irregular character. Many personages are introduced and described who do nothing towards the movement of the book; we go from scene to scene, amused by a series of clever and satirical sketches, but there is no connection between them, and no dependence of one on the other. Much as in real life we meet people, are attracted or repelled by them, and then pass each on his several way, and the one forgets the other, so it is with the characters in 'Vivian Grey.' It is more to be regarded as the overflowing of a full mind than as a mere literary production. It is a bundle of experiences, feelings, speculations, and extravagancies; amusing, clever, absurd, and bombastic by turns, but marked by unmistakeable power. A reader

unaware of its authorship and history would, in all probability, come to the conclusion that, though the work was as full of faults, crudities, and absurdities as it well could be, yet that the writer must be a man of no ordinary genius; and that conclusion would be, perhaps, as nearly a correct estimate as could well be formulated.

It is probable that Disraeli's own mind was in a state of ferment when the book was written. He felt the stirrings of ambition: he was conscious of the possession of more than usual talents: his surroundings were inducive to literary experiment; and he therefore, we may fairly suppose, flung down these crude overflowings of his mind more to relieve himself by the expression of what he felt and thought—and we may perhaps add what 'he thought he thought'—than with the serious notion of advancing his reputation by their publication. A success was gained, however, whether it was aimed at or not. The author of 'Vivian Grey' became notorious, and, in a sense, famous. He was received in society as a talented and a rising man; no longer unknown, he had ambition enough, and tact enough, to make the best of his opportunities. With the publication of 'Vivian Grey' Disraeli made one distinct step forward in that marvellous career which was to end only when all had been obtained which the most ambitious could hope for, and almost every reward bestowed which a grateful Sovereign and an applauding nation could confer on the man whom both delighted to honour.

CHAPTER IV.

LITERATURE AND TRAVEL.

To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune, but to read and write comes by nature.
Much Ado About Nothing, Act iii., Scene 3.

Cease to persuade, my loving Proteus;
Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits.—*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act i., Scene 1.

AS we have seen, the publication of 'Vivian Grey' established the reputation of 'young Disraeli,' and made him the hero of the London season. But no sooner was success achieved, than enemies began to appear. In 'Vivian Grey' too many 'bubble reputations' had been pricked, and too many fussy notabilities satirised, for the critic to be universally popular. The *Edinburgh Review* attacked both the novel and the author, and most of the Whig journals followed suit. At the same time a rumour was put in circulation to the effect that 'Vivian Grey' had established a weekly paper, the *Star Chamber*, and it was more than insinuated that its chief end and aim would be to puff the works of Disraeli and his friends. There is, however, evidence that if the *Star Chamber* was started with the intention of puffing 'Vivian Grey' and other novels, it was a woeful failure; for the print only lived three months, never had a circulation worth mentioning, nor any appreciable influence; and, above all, did not puff 'Vivian Grey' or any thing else particularly. The novel of 'Vivian Grey' was criticised, and extracts from it were given; but that was all. One other accusation made against the future Premier about this time—if accusation it can be called—was that of dandyism; and to that Disraeli must, we fear, be adjudged to have no defence. He *was* a 'buck' and a 'dandy' of the first water. His waistcoats were resplendent, and his jewellery dazzling; he carried a cane with a silk tassel, and he wore ruffles of the finest lace. All this is true enough, and we say

all natural enough. It was an age of dandyism and of fine clothes, and young Disraeli is no more to be held to be unduly vain or ridiculously effeminate because he followed the fashions of his youth, than a gentleman of our own day because he wears a dress suit. We have now fashions which favour severely-cut and neutral-tinted garments, but common sense tells us that a time may come when our sober greys and sombre blacks may appear as ridiculous to our grandchildren as Castlereagh's plum-coloured coat or Disraeli's resplendent waistcoats appear to us. The future statesman was at that time much what other young men of means were—plus the brains, and, perhaps we may add, plus too a very handsome person. If it be remembered that Lord Palmerston was, in his younger days, known as 'Cupid;' that Lord Lytton was 'the padded man who wears the stays;' and that George the Fourth was himself a most consummate dandy, we shall not be inclined to bear hardly on young Disraeli if he was a dandy also. We have a pen-and-ink portrait of him at about this period of his life, which fully sustains the charge. 'His ringlets of silken black hair,' writes Mr. Jeaffreson in his 'Novels and Novelists,' 'his flashing eyes, his effeminate air and lisping voice, his dress-coat of black velvet lined with white satin, his white kid gloves, with his wrists surrounded by a long hanging fringe of black silk, and his ivory cane, of which the handle, inlaid in gold, was relieved by more black silk in the shape of a tassel,' made, we can well imagine, a sufficiently striking picture. Mr. Jeaffreson then goes on: 'Every one laughed at him for being affected, but the women declared that his was an affectation of the best style; and they felt his personal vanity as a flattering homage to their most notorious weakness. Such was the boy exquisite who forced his way into the saloons of peeresses. Men held him in light esteem; but observant women, who are, as a rule, more discerning judges of young men than themselves, prophesied that he would live to be a great man.' As it happened, the 'observant women' were right. Under the outer husk of dandyism and affectation was a keen intellect, a magnificent courage, an untiring energy.

Young Disraeli was but biding his time. He had not been a dandy in vain or for no purpose; young as he was, he had already gained a high reputation; and, what was to him the first stepping-stone upwards, a good position in society.

The attainment of these results arose clearly from a combination of attractive qualities, for nature had in Disraeli's case been very lavish with her gifts. It was not alone his handsome face and figure and the fineness of his clothes which riveted attention, or aroused interest. Nor did people feel attracted to him for the simple reason that he had written a remarkable novel. Both these circumstances helped to mark him out as no ordinary character; but in estimating the position he won in his early days, other matters must not be lost sight of. A man would soon be voted a bore in society who had no recommendation but his face. The secret of Disraeli's popularity in aristocratic circles lay more in his mental and social endowments than his physical; in his fascinating manners, his ready wit, and his great conversational powers. Several writers who met him at this period, while drawing attention to his remarkable face, his dark piercing eyes, his jet black ringlets, and his finery, have dilated on his powers of expression, his mastery of language, and his frequent earnestness and enthusiasm. Mr. Willis, in his 'Pencillings by the Way,' describes an evening at the Countess of Blessington's, and tells us that when, in the course of conversation, Disraeli gave a sketch of the habits and manners of Beckford of Fonthill, his language and style were remarkable. 'I might as well,' says Mr. Willis, 'attempt to gather up the foam of the sea as to convey an idea of the extraordinary language in which he clothed his description. There were at least five words in every sentence that must have been very much astonished at the use they were put to, and yet no others apparently could so well have conveyed his idea. He talked like a racehorse approaching the winning-post —every muscle in action, and the utmost energy of expression flung out into every burst.' The biographer of Lady Blessington (Mr. Madden) gives similar testimony, and says it was not difficult to

predict the success of young Disraeli in public life. He was usually reserved, but 'when duly excited, his command of language was truly wonderful; his power of sarcasm unsurpassed, the readiness of his wit, the quickness of his perception, the grasp of his mind that enabled him to seize all the points of any subject under discussion, persons would only call in question who had never been in his company' at the period referred to. When we call to mind how eagerly a skilful conversationalist is welcomed in society, we may be sure that, with his other recommendations, Disraeli would be an unusually interesting guest.

In 1827 Disraeli issued a work which, though not so successful as 'Vivian Grey'—and not indeed so ambitious—yet attracted a good deal of attention and raised his reputation as an attractive and skilful writer. This work, entitled 'Popanilla,' was a humourous and satirical sketch, obviously modelled on the lines of 'Gulliver's Travels,' but differing in almost all respects from Swift's masterpiece. The great Irishman is bitter, savage, malicious. His youthful imitator is witty, humourous, ironical, and satirical, but always good-natured. We admire the work of Swift; but we can smile or laugh at the observations of the author of 'Popanilla' without feeling that in doing so we are deriding human nature. The style is marked by much of the brilliance found in the more finished parts of 'Vivian Grey,' and there are flashes of fancy, and scenes of gorgeous magnificence, which give the promise of that peculiarly oriental style of thought which afterwards was more fully developed in 'Alroy.' In some places the allegory, if we may so term it, is forced and unnatural; but, when we consider the youth of the writer, and the difficulty of this species of composition, we shall be more likely to be filled with admiration at what was accomplished than to dwell on the defects of the completed work.

Popanilla is brought before us in the first chapter as one of the inhabitants of an island in the Indian Ocean, to which the author has given the name of 'the Isle of Fantaisie.' This happy spot 'is a place where all those things are constantly found which men

most desire to see, and with the sight of which they are seldom favoured. It abounds in flowers and fruit and sunshine.' The life which the islanders lead is as happy and innocent as their native soil is beautiful and fruitful. They sleep all the hot daytime, and at night emerge from their forests to dance and feast on the sea-shore, to weave garlands of gorgeous flowers for each other, or, while drinking the delicious wine of the country, to speed the night with song and story. 'A natural instinct,' says our author, 'gave them the art of making wine, and it was the same benevolent nature which blessed them with the knowledge of the art of making love.' So time flies merrily with the inhabitants of the Isle of Fantaisie, until, in an unhappy moment, an English ship is wrecked near the island; and, though all the passengers and crew are drowned, there is washed ashore a chest, marked in huge black letters, 'S. D. K., No. 1.' Popanilla, wandering on the shore, finds this chest, opens, and discovers, as might be expected, that it is filled with books—those issued by the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge—a sly hit by the author at the mania for what was called 'the education of the masses' which then prevailed, and which, though laudable enough, was yet made somewhat ridiculous by the extravagant proceedings of some well-meaning but too enthusiastic advocates. The first volume Popanilla takes up is 'The Universal Linguist: or, the Art of Dreaming in Languages,' by Mr. Hamilton. A few pages of this treatise suffice to send Popanilla to sleep. He has an extraordinary dream, and is awakened by the chattering of a troop of monkeys, who 'had taken advantage of his slumber to become acquainted with the first principles of science. What progress they had made it was impossible to ascertain; because, each one throwing a tract at Popanilla's head, they immediately disappeared. It is said, however, that some monkeys have since been seen skipping about the island with their tails cut off; and that they have even succeeded in passing themselves off for human beings amongst those people who do not read novels, and are consequently unacquainted with mankind.'

Possessed, by virtue of his slumber over the pages of Mr. Hamilton's 'Universal Linguist'—the Hamiltonian system was in 1827 in great favour with many teachers and learners of languages—of a knowledge of all tongues, Popanilla proceeds to complete his education by reading the whole of the tracts and treatises contained in the chest of the S. D. K. Society; and becomes, in consequence, a most conceited and insufferable prig, anxious to reform the society, government, and manners of the happy islanders, and eager to convince them that whatever is, is wrong. Emerging from his retirement he returns to society, to find, to his great mortification, that he had been almost forgotten in his absence. Quickly, however, he sets about his self-imposed mission of reforming everything. He fastens upon his unhappy Sovereign just as the latter is hastening to begin the revelries of the evening, and inflicts on him a speech of some two hours duration, in which he explains the doctrines of the utilitarian school of philosophy, and displays his own great acquirements. The whole of this address is full of humorous 'hits' at the various manias of the day—educational, social, and scientific; and was doubtless intended as a skit on the assumption of encyclopædic knowledge then not very uncommon. 'The march of intellect' was the cant, much as 'art culture' and 'æsthetic development' are now. Popanilla winds up his oration by informing the king that, if all the recommendations he had ventured to make were acted upon, 'he had no hesitation in saying that a short time could not elapse ere, instead of passing their lives in a state of unprofitable ease and useless enjoyment, they might reasonably expect to be the terror and astonishment of the universe, and to be able to annoy every nation of any consequence.'

The king laughs at Popanilla's theories; declares the oration has given him a headache, and calls for a cup of wine and a dance, while the discomfited reformer sneaks home crestfallen, and 'consoles himself by reading some amusing "Conversations on Political Economy."' Popanilla has, however, more success with the young men of Fantaisie, who, after a course of instruction under the

reformer, go forth as the missionaries of the new philosophy. 'The voices of lecturing boys resounded in every part of the island. Their tones were so shrill, their manners so presuming, their knowledge so crude, and their general demeanour so completely unamiable, that it was impossible to hear them without delight, advantage, and admiration.' At length these lecturing sages so disturb the hitherto quiet and peaceful isle, that the ladies go in a body to the king and lodge a complaint, the result of which is that Popanilla the reformer is placed in a canoe, with a stock of provisions and water, and sent adrift as a public nuisance whom it is necessary to get rid of; and merriment, dancing, and singing, resume their easy sway over the inhabitants of the Isle of Fantaisie, who quickly forget all about 'the utilitarian philosophy' and the march of intellect.

Popanilla meanwhile is carried away by the current, and, in course of time, reaches the island of Vraibleusia, at the capital of which, the city Hubbabub, he lands, and, on finding himself surrounded by the inhabitants, makes a speech explaining how it is that he has been exiled from his native country, and proclaiming that, though 'actuated by the most pure, the most patriotic, the most noble, the most enlightened, and the most useful sentiments,' he has nevertheless fallen a victim to the vengeance of 'a despotic sovereign, a corrupt aristocracy, and a misguided people'—a strain of oratory which is no bad caricature of that adopted in those days, as in our own, by demagogues and agitators of a certain class. The result is an immediate subscription, and Popanilla finds his pockets filled to repletion with gold, and his personal popularity unbounded. Vraibleusia is, we need hardly say, England, and the capital Hubbabub, London, and we are quickly introduced by the author to many of the types of the genus 'notoriety' which, in 1827, were common in the metropolis. There is Mr. Skindeep, who is by no means backward in making assertions, but who ever fights shy of explanations; the Marquis of Moustache, 'a young gentleman with an expressive countenance; that is to say, his face was so covered with hair, and the back of his head cropped so bald, that you generally addressed

him in the rear by mistake.' 'The aboriginal inhabitant,' meant probably for an impersonation of the agricultural party; 'Chiron the Centaur,' the Duke of Wellington; and secretaries, directors, and so forth, are all dashed into the picture with a careless but effective pencil, and all pourtrayed with a good deal of humour of the kind of which Mr. Disraeli afterwards showed himself a master. Leaving the political world, the author next turns to satirise that of commerce, and we have a comical description of the immense cargoes of heterogeneous goods sent out to Fantaisie, on the strength of its being a new opening for commerce; and of the mad speculation which is aroused amongst merchants of all classes. The prevailing enthusiasm, too, spreads to the ladies, 'who sang *à la syrene*, dressed their hair *à la mermede*, and themselves *à la fantastique;* which, by the bye, was not new.' We have a clever sketch of the newly-enriched classes, who spring at one bound from poverty to affluence by consigning cargoes to the Isle of Fantaisie, and for whose special benefit a society is established 'for the diffusion of fashionable knowledge,' the first publication of which is a treatise on 'Listlessness,' which creates an immense sensation, and which is followed by treatises 'On Leaving Cards,' 'On Cutting Intimate Friends,' 'On Cravats,' 'On Dinner Courses,' 'On Poor Relations,' 'On Bores,' and 'On Lions;' the effect of which was, 'the new people advanced at a rate which was awful, and actually began to originate some ideas of their own,' to the great disgust and consternation of the titled aristocracy. The accomplished Popanilla now becomes a member of a horticultural society, and we have 'a dissertation on fruit,' which is, perhaps, the weakest passage in the book. The hero visits 'Blunderland' (Ireland), where he meets with some astounding adventures, and returns to Vraibleusia only to find that the fleet sent out to trade with the Isle of Fantaisie has returned, and reported that no such place exists. A commercial crisis follows, widespread ruin ensues, and the unhappy Popanilla is taken into custody, convicted of fraud, and transported; and here this wild and humourously extravagant story ends.

Had the work been the sole production of its author, it would no doubt, spite of its cleverness, have long ago sunk into oblivion; but the fact that Mr. Disraeli afterwards reached so high a position, both in the world of literature and that of politics, gives it importance as a specimen of his powers of satire in their early development. We have dealt with it thus at length, because, with all its faults, it is eminently 'Disraelish,' and shows that the young 'lion' of the London saloons saw pretty clearly through a good deal of the pretension, and, if we may use the word, the humbug of the brilliant fashionable society in which he moved, as well as of that political world in which he had already determined to make his mark. Popanilla is little more than a mere *jeu d'esprit;* but it is, even now, amusing, and shows that its author was a man possessed of no ordinary powers of satirical delineation, of humorous illustration, and of delicate sarcasm.

The youthful author did not, however, stay long enough in London to discover how the town received 'Popanilla.' He had been for some time meditating a tour in the east, and so soon as his book was fairly through the press he, in the autumn of 1829, left England in company with Mr. James Clay, afterwards M.P. for Hull, resolved on a thorough exploration of the mystic eastern land on whose history and destiny he ever loved to ponder. Of these travels, unfortunately, no account was ever published. We gather from incidental references made in after years to various places that Disraeli and his friend must have wandered widely, and have seen many lands; and we may be sure that so keen an observer as the author of 'Vivian Grey' would learn much in a tour through countries which were to him of absorbing personal interest. Venice he would regard with affection, as the abiding place of his family for two hundred years. Spain would be dear to him as the country in which they had flourished for an even longer period, until driven forth by the fierce persecution of Torquemada; while Palestine itself would be a veritable 'Holy Land,' sacred to the memories and associations and awful mysteries of the Christian faith, which he now

professed; and also inexpressibly dear to him—the descendant of a long and illustrious line of Hebrews—as the cradle of his race: the land in which had dwelt those forefathers of whom he was so proud, and whose glory and greatness were to him an ever present memory. That the impressions received during this tour never faded from the mind of Disraeli is certain; a thousand allusions scattered through his works show this; and indeed we can well understand that to such a man, sprung from an ancient race of Orientals, and inheriting many of their mental peculiarities and susceptibilities, 'the gorgeous east,' rich in 'barbaric pearl and gold,' ablaze with sunshine and crowded with picturesque life, must have been not only a present delight, but, as it were, the realisation of some undefinable dreams, the satisfaction of some vague longings which may have haunted his youthful reveries, or been the aspirations of his more mature years.

Probably, in 'Alroy,' 'Contarini Fleming,' and 'Tancred,' we get much of Disraeli's personal experiences, modified and idealised, and the scenery which he describes so vividly in those works is, doubtless, that on which his own eyes had rested. It is certain that he passed the winter of 1829 at Constantinople, and that thence he journeyed to Albania; for, in one of the notes to Alroy, he writes: 'The Orientals are famous for their massacres: that of the Mamlouks by the present Pacha of Egypt,[1] and of the Janissaries by the Sultan, are notorious. But one of the most terrible, and effected under the most difficult and dangerous circumstances, was the massacre of the Albanian Beys, by the Grand Vizier, in the autumn of 1830,—I was in Albania at the time;' and in a subsequent note to the same romance, he adds, 'I was at Yanina, the capital of Albania, when the Grand Vizier summoned the chieftains of the country, and was struck by their magnificent arrays, each day pouring into the city.' Here, by the way, Disraeli and his companion received from the Vizier some embarrassing presents, including, 'a course from his table; singers, and dancing girls;' and to the graceful movements and

[1] Mehemet Ali.

beautiful forms of these girls he more than once alludes with admiration. He then returned to Constantinople, for he notes: 'The minarets were illumined, I remember, at Constantinople at the commencement of 1831, at the departure of the Mecca caravan, and also at the annual feast of Ramadan;' and a score other passages might be cited to prove that Disraeli travelled pretty extensively in European Turkey, and made himself thoroughly familiar with Turkish manners and customs—a knowledge which in after years stood him in good stead. Egypt and Nubia were next visited, as appears from a description of 'the women descending the banks of the Nile, in procession, from every town and village,' obviously the reproduction of a scene which the writer himself had beheld, and an incidental reference to the fact that the Nubian guards of the Pacha of Egypt 'ride upon white horses.' From similar evidence we are justified in assuming that, in the course of this same year, 1831 probably, Disraeli visited and explored the great rock temple of Ipsambul. These were then very adventurous journeys—though in these days of steam vessels, railroads, and the electric telegraph, they would not be considered very remarkable—and it is a matter to be regretted that Disraeli never published any definite or detailed account of them. The Holy Land was of course visited; and scattered over his novels are references and allusions which prove that it was explored with loving care. At Jerusalem he had an adventure which had like to have cost him dearly, and of which he gives an account in a note to 'Alroy.' 'I endeavoured,' he says, 'to enter the Mosque of Omar at the hazard of my life. I was detected, and surrounded by a crowd of turbaned fanatics, and escaped with difficulty; but I saw enough to feel that minute inspection would not belie the general character I formed of it from the Mount of Olives.'

Whether the adventurous young traveller penetrated into Persia or no is somewhat uncertain; some allusions almost lead to the conclusion that he did: but assuredly he spent some time in Spain where he explored the ruins of the Alhambra, and traversed pretty

nearly the whole of Andalusia. He was also at Rome and Venice; and, in short, seems to have made himself most thoroughly acquainted with those portions of Europe which he had before left unvisited; and to have, in addition, travelled over the whole of Asia Minor. That this tour had an important influence on Disraeli goes without saying, and that influence may be traced even to the last days of his life. He had probably in his mind, as a writer well observes, the massacre of the Albanian Beys, when, half a century afterwards, he remarked, *apropos* of the allegation made during the 'Bulgarian atrocities' agitation, that the Turks had tortured their prisoners, that 'Oriental nations generally terminated their connection with their prisoners in a more summary way;' an observation which was seized upon as showing his indifference to the sufferings of the Bulgarians, but which was, in all probability, merely the expression of a conviction founded on his own experience.

During his travels abroad, Disraeli wrote, and transmitted to England for publication, three novels, 'The Young Duke,' 'Contarini Fleming' and 'The Wondrous Tale of Alroy,' besides some minor pieces; and these it will perhaps be not uninteresting to the reader to review, as, in addition to their merits as literary works, they display, in an interesting manner, the trend and bent of Disraeli's thoughts and speculations at this period of his career, and give us, under the guise of fiction, glimpses of the east and of its peoples as they presented themselves to his mind.

CHAPTER V.

THREE NOTED NOVELS.

'And truth severe by fairy fiction drest.'—*Gray.*

WHILE engaged in wandering over the greater part of Europe and Asia Minor, the pen of Disraeli was by no means idle. He was indeed at all times a hard worker, and an apposite illustration of the half truth—that it is a whole truth we should be loath to admit—that genius is simply the art of taking pains. During his tour he wrote, and forwarded to England for publication, 'The Young Duke,' 'Contarini Fleming,' 'The Wondrous Tale of Alroy,' and some minor pieces; and he also commenced to write, although he did not until 1834 publish, 'The Revolutionary Epick,' of which more anon. 'The Young Duke' was, the author tells us, written in 1829, 'when George the Fourth was King;' and he claims for it 'the indulgence which is the privilege of juvenile productions,'—an apology which is almost needless; for the work, though it is indubitably unequal in execution, is yet a novel of which any writer might justifiably be proud. The author expresses a hope that the pages of 'The Young Duke' convey a moral of a deeper and a more permanent character than might be expected from a work which ostensibly does but 'pourtray the fleeting manners of a somewhat frivolous age;' and he concludes his short preface to the reissue of 1853 by remarking, 'Young authors are apt to fall into affectation and conceit, and the writer of this work sinned very much in these respects; but the affectation of youth should be viewed leniently, and every man has a right to be conceited until he is successful'—a good-humoured way of excusing his own failing, and of laughing at the weakness of his own 'salad days,' which is characteristic of the man. A short analysis of the novel will suffice for our purpose in this connection.

'The Young Duke,' George Augustus Frederick, Duke of St. James, was left an orphan at twelve months old. His inherited wealth was great, and during his long minority his estates were admirably managed by his guardian, Mr. Dacre, a Roman Catholic gentleman of good family, with the result that, when the young duke came of age, he succeeded to a rent-roll of two hundred thousand pounds per annum, and half a million in the funds, the accumulations of his minority. While yet a boy the young duke was the object of intrigue on the part of his uncle, the Earl of Fitzpompey, who, disappointed in his expectation of being made the guardian of St. James, contrives nevertheless to have the young duke constantly at his house, and plans to secure him as the husband of his youngest daughter, Lady Caroline St. Maurice. Thanks to his natural high spirits, and talent for getting into a scrape, St. James has to leave Oxford suddenly, in order to avoid rustication; and, according to the usual fashion, sets out on the grand tour. In the course of three years he returns with a miscellaneous amount of information, and a conviction that he possesses a great knowledge of mankind; but in this, remarks the author, he was mistaken. 'Knowledge of mankind is a knowledge of their passions. The traveller is looked upon as a bird of passage whose visit is short, and which the vanity of the visited wishes to make agreeable. All is show, all false, and all made up.' His travelling experience has, however, opened St. James' eyes as to the manœuvres of Lord Fitzpompey, but he nevertheless does not break with that nobleman or his family, and he is launched upon society under the immediate patronage of the countess and her clique. The young duke takes eagerly to the pleasures of his new life, and is quickly at the head of the best and most exclusive 'set'—of the individuals comprising which we have lightly and cleverly sketched portraits, all showing keen observation on the part of the author, and all demonstrating that he possessed that power so valuable to the novelist of making his personages not mere lay figures who enunciate certain opinions, or fill certain situations, but living and moving human beings.

Fairly launched into society, the young duke begins a career of magnificent prodigality and elegant dissipation. He gives orders to an eminent architect to rebuild his town mansion, and to erect for him on one of his estates a magnificent Gothic castle; while a second architect, not less eminent, is employed to erect a mansion of pleasure, on the model of the Alhambra, in the Regent's Park. As though this were not sufficient, the duke also sets up a stud at Newmarket, of which his friend, Sir Lucius Grafton (another capitally drawn character), has the management. His guardian is completely neglected; the Fitzpompeys are tolerated; but the young duke forms 'his own set,' and determines to be the head of society, and to leave no desire ungratified which fancy can suggest, or wealth procure. 'His life was an ocean of enjoyment, and each hour, like each wave, threw up its pearl.' The author thus indicates the young duke's multifarious duties and pleasures, in this, the heyday of his prosperity and popularity:—

> Think only of prime ministers and princes, to say nothing of princesses; nay, think only of managers of operas and French actors, to say nothing of French actresses; think only of jewellers, milliners, artists, horsedealers—all the shoals who hurried for his sanction; think only of two or three thousand human beings, for whom all this population breathed, and who, each of them, had claims on our hero's notice! Think of the statesmen, who had so much to ask, and so much to give; the dandies to feed with and be fed; the dangerous dowagers, and the desperate mothers; the widows, wild as early partridges; the budding virgins, mild as a summer cloud, and soft as an opera hat! Think of the drony bores with their dull hum; think of the chivalric guardsmen, with their horses to sell and their bills to discount! Think of Willis, think of Crockford, think of White's, think of Brooks';—and you may form a faint idea of how the young duke had to talk, and eat, and flirt, and cut, and pet, and patronise!

A bitter drop soon mingles, however, with the young duke's deep draughts of pleasure. At a Doncaster race-ball he meets with a young lady with whom he falls in love at sight. He asks her name, and learns with horror that she is May Dacre, the only daughter of the guardian whom he had so insultingly neglected. The young duke manages, however, to conciliate Mr. Dacre; visits his place, and, confident in his rank, wealth, and personal advantages,

offers his hand and heart to May Dacre, somewhat after the fashion of a grand seigneur throwing the handkerchief. To his unbounded astonishment and mortification he is rejected; and, on his pressing his suit, the young lady tells him pretty plainly, that but for the direct commands of her father, she would never have consented to meet him in society. Almost frantic with rage and despair, the duke plunges anew into dissipation. A flirtation which he had commenced with Lady Aphrodite Grafton, and which her husband, for purposes of his own, does not discourage, now becomes a *liason* of a very unequivocal character. A French opera singer, known as 'the Bird of Paradise,' also comes upon the scene, and is appropriated by the young duke. The 'pace' becomes fast and furious; the revels at the Alhambra pavilion in the Regent's Park are the talk of the town, and the theme of the newspapers. At length comes a disagreeable incident. At a garden party, at which all that is brilliant in society is assembled, Sir Lucius Grafton insults May Dacre: her screams bring the young duke to her assistance; a duel follows, and St. James is wounded, and has to keep his room for a month. On his recovery, disgusted with the life he has led, tired of dissipation, and of the great world of fashion, he resolves to 'reform it altogether.' He is still passionately devoted to May Dacre; late events have somewhat re-established him in her good opinion; he once more offers his hand, and is once more rejected—more kindly, but not less decisively than at first. A fresh career of gaiety follows; but the young duke no longer enjoys the distractions which formerly gave him pleasure. While giving a series of *fêtes* at his seat in Cornwall, he receives a letter from his bankers which astounds him: the half million is gone, his income expended, and his account overdrawn to a considerable amount. Roused by the shock he hastens to London, and an investigation of his affairs shows him that he is in debt to the amount of eight hundred thousand pounds. In his madness he seeks to retrieve himself by gambling, with the result that he loses a hundred thousand pounds more. Half mad with anxiety, shame, remorse, and mortification, he at

length writes to his father's friend, Mr. Dacre, soliciting his forgiveness, and asking assistance in arranging his affairs. It is promptly and cheerfully given, and the young duke becomes a member of Mr. Dacre's household. His passion for May Dacre is as fervent as ever; but he now believes it to be hopeless, for he is led to imagine that a successful rival—one, Arundel Dacre, a nephew of his host—has gained May's heart. After a struggle, however, the young duke's natural generosity prompts him to make May Dacre happy, even at the cost of his own misery. He secretly returns Arundel for one of his Cornish boroughs, and is very warmly thanked by the Dacres—father and daughter. A chance remark made by Miss Dacre, as to the Catholic Emancipation Bill, then awaiting its second reading in the House of Lords, induces the young duke to travel secretly to London, when he makes a great speech in favour of the Catholic claims. On his return to the family seat of the Dacres, he is received with more than kindness. Fresh hope arises within him, and once more he proffers his hand and heart to May Dacre, by whom he is accepted. An explanation follows, and the young duke finds that his supposed rival, Arundel Dacre, is in reality a suitor for the hand of his cousin, Lady Caroline St. Maurice, and that May was but the *confidante* of the youthful couple. Money matters are arranged satisfactorily by the aid of Mr. Dacre, and the curtain falls.

Such, roughly, is an outline of the story of 'The Young Duke,' but, like most of Disraeli's novels, the plot and action are but small parts of the excellence of the whole. What delights the readers of the novel are the brilliant passages of description, the quiet sarcasm, the cynical humour, the felicitous epithets which are found in every page, and, above all, the keen sketches of character with which the work abounds. Some of the scenes, too—as, for example, that in which the Duke of St. James plays so desperately and loses so heavily—are powerfully painted, while other chapters almost dazzle by their gorgeous descriptions of magnificent mansions, and of Sardanapalian revels. The moral of the work is, of course, obvious

enough. It is a commentary on, and an amplification of, the saying of the preacher, 'All is vanity.' We have placed before us the career of a youth with every advantage of birth, wealth, talent; we have him represented as devoting his whole attention to his own gratification, and we have represented, too, the utter disgust and weariness which succeed the first intoxication of success.

In striking contrast to 'The Young Duke' was Disraeli's next work, 'Alroy'—a romance wild, extravagant, and gorgeous indeed, but marked throughout by the inspiration of genius. The style is as peculiar as the plot and conduct of the work. It is a kind of poetical prose, in places pitched in a key of lofty eloquence, but at times sinking to mere fustian, and occasionally running into a sort of rhyme, of which the effect is, to say the least, singular. With all its faults, however, 'Alroy' is a splendid work, one which could only have been written by a youth of genius, and by one whose heart was glowing with the pride of race, and whose mind had pondered over the annals of Judah in the day of her glory, until his spirit burned within him, and his lips were touched as with a live coal from the altars of the faith of his fathers. The author's own account of the conception of the story is this:*—'Being at Jerusalem in the year 1831, and visiting the traditionary tombs of the Kings of Israel, my thoughts recurred to a personage whose marvellous career had, even in boyhood, attracted my attention as one fraught with the richest materials of poetic fiction. And I then commenced these pages.' Of the work itself it is rather difficult to give the reader an idea without the aid of extracts, which would trespass too much upon our space. The scene is laid in Asia; the period is the twelfth century, when the Caliphate was in a state of decay, and when the Seljukian sultans, who had been called to the assistance of the Commander of the Faithful, were themselves becoming enervated and degenerate. The Hebrews, scattered after the destruction of Jerusalem, yet amongst themselves acknowledged a head, a native ruler, held to be a descendant of the line of David.

* Preface to edition of 1845.

These native rulers were named 'Princes of the Captivity,' and to them the wretched yet hopeful Hebrews looked, in the confident expectation that from the royal house of David would yet arise a deliverer, who would rescue the chosen people from the thraldom under which they groaned, and restore the ancient glories of Israel. Alroy, the hero of the romance, is one of these princes of the captivity, the last descendant of the line of David. Possessed of a haughty, ambitious spirit, and burning to raise up his degraded nation, he looks with disdain on the temporising policy of his uncle Bostenay, who is content to purchase toleration for the Hebrews by the payment of tribute to the Moslem. Fierce, moody, and discontented, Alroy meditates suicide, but is dissuaded by the pleadings of his sister Miriam—one of the most pleasing of Disraeli's female creations. He still dreams, however, of raising up once more the throne of his fathers, and fate precipitates him into action. As his sister and her maidens visit the fountain at eve, they are surprised by Alschiroch, son of the governor of the city of Hamadan, who attempts to carry off Miriam. Her shrieks reach the ears of Alroy, who, rushing upon the scene, brains the would-be ravisher, and rescues his sister. Like a second Moses, Alroy, who has 'slain a prince of the people,' flies to the desert, and we have a splendid description of his solitary ride across those terrific and desolate wastes of sand. At length he reaches the object of his journey, the dwelling of one Jabaster, a cabalist and magician, who has been Alroy's tutor in his youth, but who has, since an unsuccessful revolt against the Moslem conqueror, fled to a cave in the highest range of the Caucasian mountains. Sleeping in the cave of Jabaster, Alroy is summoned by the 'Daughter of the Voice' to fulfil his high destiny as the Messiah of Israel, and from the cabalist he receives further instruction. The first step in his career will be to possess himself of the sceptre of his great ancestor—Solomon. This quest he must undertake alone. Jabaster, the cabalist and magician, may counsel, but he cannot accompany him; and alone, therefore, Alroy departs, bearing with him only his dagger, his staff, his wallet, a talisman, and a

ring, which is to serve as a token, should the prince of the captivity encounter, in the course of his wanderings, the brother of Jabaster, of whom he has lost sight for many years. Nerved by a consciousness of his great destiny, Alroy traverses the desert, meeting with many wild and fearful adventures. He is taken prisoner by Koord bandits, but escapes; he is overwhelmed by the simoon, but picked up, when near dead, by a caravan of merchants, and carried to Bagdad, where he meets with Honain, the Caliph's physician, whom, by the agency of the ring, he discovers to be the long-lost brother of Jabaster. Befriended by Honain, he is introduced, in the guise of a mute, to the daughter of the Caliph, the Princess Schirene, of whom he becomes desperately enamoured. Nevertheless, driven onward by his lofty purpose, he once more departs, the object of his journey being the city of Jerusalem, in the neighbourhood of which he hopes to find the sceptre of Solomon, of which he is in search. Reaching the city at length, he, for a time, becomes the guest of the chief Rabbi, but can gain no clue to the object of his search; until one night, sleeping amongst the tombs at the base of Mount Olivet, he overhears a conversation between two genii, which reveals to him the whereabouts of the magic metropolis where Solomon, the great King, yet holds his state, hidden from human eyes. Possessed of this dread secret, Alroy resolves to visit the city, and gain possession of the sceptre, which is to be the symbol of his divine mission as the deliverer of Israel from captivity. The descent of the prince of the captivity to the hall of the kings is magnificently described, and illustrates in a striking manner what we have before spoken of as the oriental and mystical side of Disraeli's genius. No detached quotation could, however, give the reader any adequate idea of the wild and mystical splendour of this marvellous romance of Judaism, and we must refer those interested in the matter to the book itself.

Possessed of the sceptre of Solomon, Alroy quickly gathers round him a band of devoted adherents. A sharp skirmish, in which he is victorious, increases them to a host. He enters Hamadan in

triumph; and, in a bloody battle, the forces of the Seljuck Sultan are defeated in the plain of Nehauend. Alroy marches from victory to victory, and at length enters Bagdad itself. Here, however, he meets with the Princess Schirene; and, spite of the warnings of his most trusty counsellor, marries her. Infatuated with his bride, Alroy forgets his high mission, discontent creeps into his host, and treason rears its head. A plot to assassinate Alroy fails, and Jabaster is, for his connection with it, condemned to death, and executed by order of the queen. From this time Alroy's fortunes fall away; his captains betray him, and at last he is defeated by the King of Karasmé in a bloody battle, and taken prisoner. Refusing to submit, or to declare himself an impostor, the tyrant, in a moment of fury, strikes off his head. This meagre outline will be sufficient to enable the reader to form an idea of the character of this extraordinary work, but to fully appreciate it the book itself must be studied. It is permeated with the spirit of Judaism in its most weird and romantic developments, an eastern gorgeousness blazes through its paragraphs, the air is thick with perfumes, and the gleam of gold and jewels lights up every page. Extravagant it is, but it is a work of genius; and had Disraeli left nothing but 'Alroy,' that alone would have borne his name down to posterity as no unworthy rival of Beckford, or Hope, in the delineation of the strange life of the far and mysterious east.

'Contarini Fleming' was the last of the three great works which Disraeli produced during the period over which his travels extended. It is a work totally different in construction and treatment to any of his preceding novels, and its object is explained in part by its second title, 'a psychological romance.' The author himself tells us that he designed to pourtray the development and formation of the poetic character; and, to a certain extent, he has done so. The latter part of the novel may perhaps, however, be taken as a record of the author's own travels; for the individuality of Fleming falls into the back ground, and we have a series of brilliant descriptions of places, of peoples, and of adventures which—so far as we can

discover, at all events—have little or no connection with the hero's psychological development at all. They are picturesque and vivid reproductions of cities and of people; and, as we have said, are to a very great extent descriptions of places which Disraeli himself visited; and so, in some sort, supply the lack of any more formal account of his wanderings. From these vivid pages many fine word-pictures might be culled, did our space permit, which would show at once Disraeli's keen powers of observation, and his command of language. As for what we may call the psychological part of the work, that is also deeply interesting, and shows a wonderful insight into the workings of the human mind; but the necessary dependence of one part upon another renders quotation impracticable. Briefly, we may say that Contarini Fleming is the son of Baron Fleming, a leading politician at one of the minor German courts. His mother was a Contarini, a member of one of the most distinguished Venetian families. She dies soon after the hero's birth; and Baron Fleming takes as a second wife a lady, amiable indeed, but weak-minded, and to her the character of her step-son—which is in truth a curious one—is a perpetual enigma. In a succession of powerfully written chapters we have laid before us the gradual development of the hero's mind. He is intensely imaginative, morbidly sensitive, passionately ambitious. His school career is a failure, not because of his lack of ability, but because of his want of sympathy with the system of education to which he is made amenable. At college he is at first signally successful for the spirit of emulation has been aroused. Soon, however, he wearies of the petty triumphs of the class-room, and longs for a larger stage and for more energetic action. He persuades his fellow-students to share his romantic dreams. A number of them suddenly leave college, and betake themselves to the forest, where for a time they live as bandits.

Circumstances break up the association, and Contarini returns to his father's house. Stimulated by the brilliant position won by his father, he, with his usual impetuosity, determines to become a

diplomatist. For a time he is exceedingly prosperous; his father becomes Prime Minister, and he himself is made an Under Secretary of State. In the midst of his diplomatic labours, however, he is suddenly seized with a desire for literary fame. He writes a satirical novel which makes a great sensation. Its effect is humorously described; and the reader will not have much hesitation in coming to the conclusion, that in sketching this part of Contarini's career, the author is in fact telling the story of the production and reception of his own novel of 'Vivian Grey.' Contarini is now disgusted with politics; but his father, who has noted his inattention to his duties, appoints him *attaché* to the legation at London. Contarini starts for Paris, where it is arranged he shall stay *en route;* but Paris he never reaches. For years he has been filled with a passionate longing to visit Venice, the cradle of his race; and to Venice he travels accordingly. There he meets, under strange and mysterious circumstances, a beautiful cousin, Alcesté Contarini, the sole survivor of the Italian branch of his house. His passion for this beautiful being is declared; and, after some exciting scenes, he makes her his bride, and they fly to one of the isles of the Greek archipelago. Here for a year they lead a life of happy tranquility, which is brought to a painful termination by the death of Alcesté, who dies in giving birth to a still-born child. Driven to desperation, Contarini attempts to commit suicide, but fails; and, after a period of apathetic despair, resumes, with broken spirits and shattered health, his wanderings. He visits Spain, Egypt, Syria, takes part in a battle in Albania, and then again returns to Greece, where he receives letters announcing the death of his father, and determines to return to his native land. Here the story—after the fashion of most of those of Disraeli—breaks off abruptly, and we are left to imagine for ourselves the hero's future career. The plot of the story is, as will be seen, slight; but wonderful skill is shown in the working out of the development of Contarini's mind; and the descriptions of scenery, of manners, and of cities, are, as we have said, vivid in the highest degree. Spite of its power, and of its many beauties,

however, it is to be doubted whether 'Contarini Fleming' will ever become popular. Disraeli tells us himself that it was not so on its first appearance—it was published anonymously—and he in part accounts for this by stating that it was published 'in the midst of a revolution,' *i.e.*, during the stormy time which preceded the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. By a select few the work was cordially welcomed; and the author mentions that Göethe, and Beckford, the author of 'Fathek,' were amongst its warm admirers—a circumstance which, doubtless, went far to console Disraeli for the general frigidity of its reception

In addition to the three works we have named, Disraeli also published, between the years 1830–33, some minor works: 'Ixion in Heaven,' a burlesque sparkling with wit, and full of gay humour; 'The Infernal Marriage,' similar in treatment, and equally brilliant; 'Count Alarcos,' a somewhat stilted tragedy; and, 'The Rise of Iskander,' a work which will add little to his reputation, though from any other writer it might have been deemed worthy of attention and of praise.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POLITICAL DEBUT

'Ah! who shall tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar?'—*Beattie.*

WITH the publication of 'Contarini Fleming,' we may regard as terminated the purely literary portion of Disraeli's career. The work had not, as we have seen, been particularly successful, a circumstance which in itself might weigh with its author in deciding that, for a time, his pen should be laid aside; but there were other reasons than this for the 'discouragement from further effort'[1] in the direction of works of fiction, which he himself tells us he felt at this period. A wider, more strenuous, and more exciting career was opening itself before the mind's eye of Disraeli. The times were stirring ones, and in the world of politics there was scope for the most daring ambition, and opportunity for the display of the most commanding talents. There was the field where honour could be more quickly won than in the less stormy domain of literature; and Disraeli flung himself into the strife with all the ardour of his impetuous yet determined nature. He had returned to England to find his father, Isaac D'Israeli, quietly settled at Bradenham House, whither he had removed, in 1825, at the instigation of his friends the Pyes; and to find, too, the country in the very thick of the great struggle for reform, though practically there was little doubt as to how that struggle would terminate. Those had indeed been stormy and eventful years during which Disraeli had been absent; and we shall perhaps be better able to appreciate the situation of matters political on his return if we glance briefly at what had occurred during his absence.

[1] Preface to 'Contarini Fleming.'

Lord Liverpool, who had for fifteen years been Prime Minister of England, had passed away in 1829, after a long and hopeless illness; the Duke of York was also dead, and with him had gone the greatest obstacle to the emancipation of the Catholics. Canning —who was, we may remark *en passant*, always described by his opponents as 'a political adventurer,' just as Disraeli was in later years—had succeeded Lord Liverpool as Premier, but he, too, had been called away; and Lord Goderich had taken up the reins of power, only to resign them, after a short term of office, into the hands of the Duke of Wellington—the only man who at that crisis could at once command the support of the country and the House of Commons, and 'manage' the King, who was day by day becoming more irritable, weak, and headstrong. The fiercest opponent of the Duke was Henry Brougham; while Mr. Peel, afterwards Sir Robert Peel, was the leader of the House of Commons. The Duke and Mr. Peel had both been uncompromising opponents of the Catholic claims; but, to use a phrase of Lord Beaconsfield's, 'a good deal had happened since then;' and the Wellington ministry had not long been in power before both the Duke and his sagacious lieutenant were convinced that Catholic emancipation must be conceded. The Irish demagogue, O'Connell, had been returned for County Clare, and was thundering at the door of the House of Commons, to which he could not as yet obtain admission; and it was confidently predicted that, ere many months were over, Ireland would be the theatre of civil war. The difficulty in the way of the enfranchisement of the Catholics was the King. George IV. was paying the penalty of a vicious life; his health was wretchedly bad, and, what was perhaps worse, his conscience was ill at ease. He was in the position commonly described as 'not knowing his own mind.' The Duke pressed the claims of the Catholics, and urged the necessity of conceding them, until the King was so bewildered that 'he hardly knew what he was about,'[1] and told him to 'Go on.' Then, getting frightened at being taken at his word, he sent for Lord Eldon, and

[1] Twiss. Vol. iii., p. 83.

a striking picture the sturdy old Chancellor gives of the various interviews. The King bemoaned himself in most dismal fashion, crying 'What can I do? What can I now fall back upon? What *can* I fall back on?' exclaiming that he was 'wretched,' and threatening that he would 'make no Catholic peers,' that he would go abroad and stop there, and that 'Clarence or Sussex' would make a Catholic King. At length Lord Eldon, who, whatever his faults, was at least a man of ability and of courage, told the King that he had plainly pledged himself; and George IV. gave way. The Bill for the relief of the Catholics was passed, and so one burning question was disposed of.

But another, equally serious, arose directly in the path of the Duke's administration — we mean the question of Parliamentary Reform. Lord John Russell was the moving spirit here, though, up to 1829, he had not succeeded in making much headway; and, but for an imprudent speech by the Duke of Wellington, the Reform Bill passed in 1832 might possibly have been postponed for some years. The year 1830 came on amidst general anxiety, and the events to which it gave birth justified the gloomy anticipations. In England great distress prevailed, and the country was filled with men who were discontented because they were in want, and reckless because they had no longer anything to lose. Charles X. had been driven from the throne of France, and the spirit of revolution was abroad in Europe. It was an anxious and a dangerous time, and the Duke and Mr. Peel must often have felt uncomfortable between the King on the one hand, and a hostile House of Commons and a discontented people on the other. But Wellington knew that, as things were, he was the only possible Premier, and his stern sense of duty to his King and country sustained him. The House of Commons and the nation knew, too, that the Duke was indispensable; and so, in a somewhat haphazard fashion, matters drifted along for a time. A change was, however, coming. On the 26th June, 1830, King George IV. died, and was succeeded by his brother, the Duke of Clarence, who took the title of William IV.

A dissolution of parliament took place on July 24th, and the writs were made returnable for September 14th, but the session was not opened until November 2nd. The speech from the throne was scarcely calculated to soothe the country, or to conciliate the opposition in parliament. It referred to the revolutions in France and the Netherlands, spoke of the determination of the government to abide by the treaties into which the country had entered, alluded in terms of indignation to the agrarian crimes which had disgraced the southern counties during the past year, and indicated the necessity for the nomination of a regency, as, in the event of the King's death, the crown would fall by inheritance to the Princess Victoria, then a child of eleven. There was not a word directly alluding to reform, and the omission was held to be ominous. The Duke of Wellington, however, soon put the matter beyond doubt. Replying to a speech by Earl Grey, in which that nobleman had expressed the opinion that the only remedy for the discontent of the country was the redress of the grievances of the people and the extension of the franchise, the Duke said he was 'fully convinced that the country possessed at that moment a legislature which answered all the good purposes of legislation. He would go further, and say that the legislature, and the system of representation, possessed the full and entire confidence of the country. He was not prepared to bring forward any legislation of the description alluded to by the noble lord. He was not only not prepared to bring forward any legislation of this nature, but he would at once declare that, as far as he was concerned, as long as he held any station in the government of the country, he should always feel it his duty to resist such measures when proposed by others.'[1]

This emphatic statement was, of course, an open declaration of war, and the Whigs, Liberals, and Radicals drew together in preparation for the coming combat. Mr. Brougham gave notice in the Commons of his intention to bring forward the subject of parliamentary reform in a fortnight's time; and sagacious men saw

[1] 'Hansard,' Third Series, Vol. I., col. 52.

that the Duke had, in a moment of indiscretion, wrecked his ministry by pledging himself to an attitude of uncompromising opposition to an inevitable event. The end soon came. On November 15th, Sir Henry Parnell brought forward a motion for a select committee to examine the accounts presented in connection with the Civil List. Mr. Goulburn, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, met the motion by a direct negative. A short and sharp debate ensued, and ministers were, on a division, defeated by a majority of 29, in a house of 437 members. This defeat might not have been decisive under other circumstances; but the Duke and Mr. Peel knew that Mr. Brougham's motion, which was to come on next day, would assuredly be carried against them; and, as the Duke himself afterwards admitted, he resigned because he 'did not wish to expose his Majesty and the country to the consequences that might result from the government going out on the success of the question of parliamentary reform.' The determination was, under the circumstances, no doubt a judicious one, but it is to be regretted that the Duke had not earlier foreseen the probable result of any rash declaration on the subject of reform, and not committed himself prematurely to a position which left him no alternative between complete victory and disastrous defeat. After some difficulty a ministry was formed, with Earl Grey as Premier, Lord Althorp as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Viscount Melbourne as Home Secretary, Viscount Palmerston as Foreign Secretary, Lord John Russell as Paymaster of the Forces, and Mr. Brougham, who was created Lord Brougham and Vaux, Lord Chancellor. Ministers fairly installed in office, the routine work of the session was gone through; and, on December 23rd, parliament was prorogued to February 3rd, 1831, when it was well known there would commence the great fight on the question of reform, to the carrying out of which to a successful issue the ministry of Earl Grey was pledged.

Parliament met on February 3rd, but it was not until March 1st that the Reform Bill was introduced by Lord John Russell, who, in a speech marked by ability and moderation, explained the details of

the measure. Of the excitement which a proposal so daring and, as was then thought, so revolutionary, produced both in the legislature and throughout the country, we need not here speak at length. Suffice it to say that it was most intense. The anti-reformers prophesied the destruction of the constitution, while the ministerialists affirmed that the passage of the bill could alone avert a revolution. After a fierce debate, in which Sir R. Inglis, Mr. Macaulay (afterwards Lord Macaulay), Mr. Stanley (the late Lord Derby), Sir Robert Peel, and many others almost equally eminent, spoke, the bill was read a first time on March 14th. The second reading was moved by Lord John Russell on the 21st, and it was carried by a majority of one only in a House of 605 members. On the 18th of April the House went into committee on the bill; and, on the 19th, an amendment, moved by General Gascoigne, to the effect that the number of members comprising the House of Commons be not reduced, was carried against the government by 299 against 291 The ministry, thus defeated, had only the resource of an appeal to the country—a terribly hazardous step in the midst of the fierce excitement which prevailed. On the morning of Friday, the 22nd, Earl Grey and Lord Brougham waited on the King, and after an interview which has become historical,[1] his Majesty was prevailed upon to go down to Westminster and dissolve parliament. Amidst a scene of tumult, exultation, indignation, and wild uproar, rarely if ever before witnessed in a British legislative assembly since the days of Cromwell's famous dispersion of the Long Parliament, the fateful words were pronounced, and the country was plunged at once into the midst of a general election.

All our modern notions of party conflicts can give us but little idea of the bitterness of the controversy between reformers and anti-reformers which raged at this time; and as we are merely giving a brief outline of the course of events, we need not dwell upon it. At last the battle was over, and when the new parliament met, on the 14th June, it was known that ministers were triumphant, and that

[1] See Roebuck's 'History of the Whig Ministry.' Vol. II.

the question of reform would now be practically decided. On the 24th, Lord John Russell brought forward a second measure of reform framed on much the same lines as the first, though it only applied to England, for Scotland and Ireland were dealt with in separate bills. The protracted debates, the desperate struggles, the excited eloquence, the bitter animosities of that memorable struggle we must pass over. The bill was read, discussed, and finally passed its third reading on the 21st September. Then came the great question, 'What will the Lords do?' The country looked with feverish anxiety to the Upper House, for it was well known that the majority of peers were hostile to the measure. The debate on the second reading commenced on the 3rd October, and continued for five nights. During that debate the Lords showed themselves equal to their high station. Whatever may be thought of the prudence, or even of the wisdom of their action, it is not to be denied that the debate in the Upper House was marked by an eloquence, an earnestness, and a power worthy of so great an assembly. It was between six and seven in the morning of October 8th, that the division took place. The numbers were—content, 158; non-content, 199. The Lords had thrown out the bill. The excitement rose to fever heat in the country. 'Would ministers resign?' was the question, and it was quickly answered. Lord Grey retained office; and, on October 20th, both Houses were prorogued, with an intimation that the Reform Bill would be again brought forward next session. The country was now in a terrible state. There were riotous assemblies in all the large towns. The Birmingham reformers spoke openly of a revolution; a fearful riot took place at Bristol, in the course of which many public buildings were destroyed; the gaol at Derby was broken open; in the course of some disturbances at Nottingham the Castle was fired and burned to the ground; and the very bonds of society seemed loosened. In the rural districts 'Captain Swing' was at his dreadful work, and each night the blazing rick-yards testified to the madness, the frenzy, and the wretchedness of men misled by the acts of demagogues, and reckless from misery. These

acts were not, of course, to be charged on the reform party, but there can be no doubt that the name of Reform was used by desperate agitators to inflame the populace and incite them to deeds of savagery. To add to the horrors of the time, the cholera made its appearance, and the political and social confusion was made worse confounded by the terrors of pestilence.

In the midst of these convulsions, on the 6th December, 1831, parliament met, and the Reform Bill was again brought forward. The old battles were fought over again with all the old bitterness and pertinacity, and once more the bill was carried triumphantly through its various stages, and passed the third reading on the 19th March, 1832, by a majority of 116. Then came the conflict with the Lords. The second reading was carried on the 14th April by a majority of nine—184 against 175 votes; and parliament adjourned till May 7th. It was felt, however, that the bill was not safe; and ministers asked the King for his sanction to the creation of additional peers, so as to 'swamp' the opposition. William IV. peremptorily refused, and the ministry resigned. A fearful week followed; by common consent of writers of the period the country was on the verge of revolution, and the Birmingham Political Union threatened that two hundred thousand men should march up and take possession of London if the bill were not passed. The Duke of Wellington endeavoured to form an administration, but failed. Lord Grey and his friends were again summoned by the King; and, on May 18th, the Premier announced that he had confident hopes of carrying the bill in the Upper House. His confidence was natural; for ministers had again asked, and had obtained from the King, power to create peers in sufficient numbers to carry the bill through the Lords, if such a desperate expedient became necessary through the obstinacy of the anti-reform peers. Petitions were sent up in shoals, immense meetings were held, and the country was at fever heat. The peers, with the Duke of Wellington at their head, gave way, the bill passed, and on the 7th June received the royal assent. The bills dealing with Scotland and Ireland became law a few weeks after.

Such was the terrible struggle known as the Reform Bill agitation. It shook the kingdom to its foundations, and the din of the strife re-echoed through the civilised world. Amongst others who watched with keen interest the progress of this battle of giants was Benjamin Disraeli, and from the wild eastern lands where he was then sojourning he had hurried to England to participate in the conflict. The battle had been practically decided ere he could come forward, but it was his fate to be a candidate for the suffrages of an English constituency at the very last of the elections held under the old order of things. The borough of High Wycombe, or Chipping Wycombe, was, in the beginning of 1832, represented by the Hon. Robert Smith and Sir Thomas Baring, both Whigs, but of a, for those days, somewhat advanced type. The town itself was, for the most part, Radical in feeling, a large number of the inhabitants being 'Friends,' or, as they were vulgarly termed, 'Quakers.' There was, however, a not inconsiderable Tory minority; and there were probably a good number of the Wycombites who had no very definite political creed at all. A constituency, in the modern acceptation of the term, could hardly be held to exist. The parish was 6,318 acres in extent, but the municipal borough comprised but 128 acres;[1] and the returning body was composed exclusively of the corporation and burgesses of the town, amounting to some sixty electors all told. In May, 1832, rumours began to circulate to the effect that Sir Thomas Baring contemplated retiring from the representation of High Wycombe, in order to contest the county of Hants, and Disraeli at once came forward as a candidate for the expected vacancy. There has been a vast amount of acrimonious, and, perhaps, not very profitable, controversy as to the political creed which Disraeli professed at this time; and some remarks meant to be exceedingly scathing have been made on his alleged duplicity and double-dealing. It has been affirmed that, being at heart a Tory, he, for the sake of gaining the suffrages of the electors, professed himself a Radical; and that by false pretences he induced Mr. Hume and Mr. O'Connell

[1] Sheahan's 'History of Buckinghamshire.'

to support his candidature. The truth of the matter appears to us to be, that Disraeli at that time, as throughout his whole life, held opinions, some of which were, roughly speaking, Tory; while others might, without any undue straining, be described as Radical. Nor is the apparent inconsistency difficult to understand; neither is it an unheard of thing for an independent politician to be branded by one party as a Tory, while he is at the same time stigmatised by other opponents as a Radical. If examples were needed, we might mention two able and honest men of our own time, Mr. Roebuck, the late member for Sheffield; and Mr. Joseph Cowen, the present member for Newcastle;—both of whom have been fiercely denounced as Tories by those who are more ready to bestow a political nickname than to investigate the principles of a political career.

The circumstance that Disraeli should have published letters in support of his candidature from Hume and O'Connell is explainable. We cannot but regard the circumstance as an unfortunate one, though Disraeli himself was, in all probability, not directly responsible for it, the active agent in the matter being Mr. Edward Lytton-Bulwer, then member for St. Ives; while a note from Sir F. Burdett appears to have been obtained, not by Disraeli personally, but by Mr. Charles Gore. It has been asserted by Mr. Hume, and by Mr. Scott, his secretary, that Disraeli called upon him to ask for the letter. Disraeli denied that he did so. Now, we can conceive it possible enough that Mr. Hume and his secretary may have confounded the fact that Mr. Lytton-Bulwer called on account of Disraeli, with an assumed call on the part of Disraeli personally; but we cannot suppose, on the other hand, that Disraeli did call on Mr. Hume on such an errand, and forgot the circumstance. The matter lies in small compass: either Mr. Hume and Mr. Scott were mistaken, or Disraeli publicly stated that which he knew to be wrong, and which he also knew could be shown to be wrong by two witnesses. The decision seems to us easily arrived at—Mr. Hume and his secretary confused Mr. Lytton-Bulwer's visit to request a letter from

Mr. Hume in favour of Disraeli's candidature, with a call by Disraeli himself. That this is so is also suggested by the letters of Mr. Lytton-Bulwer, and of Mr. Hume. The former writes, under date of June 3rd, 1832, to Disraeli, 'I have received from my friend, Mr. Hume, a letter addressed to you.' Why should Mr. Hume send the solicited letter to Mr. Lytton-Bulwer, if Disraeli had himself asked for it in person? And again: 'You will receive his letter at latest on Tuesday morning, and so anxious was he on your behalf, that he would not leave London, though on matters of urgent business, until he had written it.' Do not these words point irresistibly to the conclusion that Mr. Lytton-Bulwer managed the negotiations with Mr. Hume, and that, directly and personally, Disraeli had not, as he affirmed, appeared in the matter. Let it be noted, too, that Mr. Hume himself merely says that his 'impression certainly is that he (Disraeli) did call upon me in Bryanstone Square, to solicit my support as a candidate for Wycombe.'[1] Contrasting Mr. Hume's 'impression' with Mr. Lytton-Bulwer's letter quoted above, and with Disraeli's own direct denial, the true solution of the matter seems to us obvious. Mr. Scott's evidence on the point we hold to be valueless, though he no doubt conceived himself to be stating a fact. Mr. Scott affirms that Disraeli called on Mr. Hume, and made 'a general profession of his political principles, which he stated were in accordance with those which Mr. Hume is well known to advocate.' Disraeli denied this point blank; and when we come to look closely at the matter, we find again that the evidence points to a mistake on the part of Mr. Scott. That gentleman admits that he might have forgotten the fact of Disraeli's interview with Mr. Hume 'but for the circumstance of a friend of Mr. Hume's stating in a blunt way, on hearing what he had done, that he was very wrong in doing so, as Mr. Disraeli was a d——d Tory, and that Mr. Hume would soon find him so.' Does this again prove the point that Mr. Disraeli personally saw Mr. Hume? Is it not consistent with the supposition that it was Mr. Lytton-Bulwer who

[1] In a letter to the *Globe*, January 11th, 1836.

did so, and who explained Disraeli's political principles as he understood them? We think it is. The 'd——d Tory' speech would be provoked by the fact of the letter having been written at all, and not by the supposed fact of Disraeli personally calling upon Mr. Hume; while Mr. Scott's admission that he had 'almost forgotten' the circumstance, renders it more than probable that he, no doubt honestly, but mistakenly, jumped to the conclusion that Disraeli had personally solicited the letter. Now, what is Disraeli's own account? In a letter to the *Times* of December 31st, 1835, he says, 'A friend of mine interested in my success, knowing that I was supported by that portion of the constituency styled Radicals, applied to Mr. O'Connell and Mr. Hume.' Here we have a natural and probable explanation of the difficulty; and with the acceptance of that explanation there falls to the ground a whole superstructure of calumny, vituperation, and misrepresentation which has been laboriously built up on the assumption that Disraeli personally called on Mr. Hume and explained his political opinions, and the insulting deduction that when he affirmed he had not done so, he was deliberately stating that which he knew to be untrue. We have dealt thus at length with this incident, not only because it is important in itself, but also because it is a sample of the manner in which the attacks on Disraeli's honesty have been conducted by his opponents. The circumstances have, in this instance, been tortured to fit a preconceived theory; and, on the false assumption of the correctness of that theory, Disraeli has been branded as untruthful. There was, we may remark, a similar attack made by O'Connell on Disraeli, but the examination of that must be postponed to a later period.

To return to the election: Disraeli had, as we have seen, come forward on the strength of a rumour that Sir Thomas Baring was about to retire; but either Sir Thomas had not quite made up his mind, or there were other reasons for delay. A few days after the letters from Mr. Hume and Mr. O'Connell had been published, recommending Disraeli to the electors, Mr. Hume addressed a letter

to the two sitting members, stating that he was not aware when he wrote his first letter that Disraeli 'would come in opposition to either of them;' and adding that it would give him (Mr. Hume) 'considerable pain' if his statement in Disraeli's favour had 'tended to disturb' them in the maintenance of their seats. This looked much as though Sir Thomas meant to keep the seat for Wycombe if he could; but in a few days the matter was set at rest by his formal retirement, and the battle commenced. Whether Disraeli was or was not a Tory might be a matter open to discussion; that he was not a Whig was very evident, and therefore the ministerial party lost no time in opposing him. The candidate they pitched upon was the Hon. Col. Grey, third son of the then Premier, but known better to this generation from having subsequently filled the post of private secretary to her Majesty, and edited the first volume of 'The Life of the Prince Consort.' Had the battle been fought on the narrow ground of personal ability, there is no doubt that Disraeli would have been victorious, for he was immeasurably the superior of Col. Grey as a speaker and as a politician—a fact to which the *Bucks. Herald* did not omit to draw the attention of the constituency.' But circumstances quite apart from personal qualifications made Col. Grey a most formidable opponent. He was the son of the Prime Minister; and the ministry had, as we have just seen, practically carried one of the most popular measures of the century, after a tremendous and exciting struggle. Then Col. Grey had at his back the whole of the influence, social and political, of the Whig magnates. Lord Nugent, one of the Lords of the Treasury, and Mr. Vizard, Secretary of the Treasury, were sent down to his aid; and it was affirmed openly in the *Bucks. Herald* that Col. Grey was 'backed by the Treasury purse,' and that the issue of the writ had been purposely delayed so as to, as far as possible, deprive Disraeli of the advantage which he had gained by being first in the field. That considerable pressure was used in official quarters is highly probable. The Whig organ, the *Bucks. Gazette*, fell foul of Disraeli with an eagerness which showed at least that the party

were considerably disturbed at the prospect of his return; while the Tory organ, the *Bucks. Herald*, wrote favourably of the young 'adventurer' who had so daringly bearded the Whigs in one of their strongholds, and who was waging so stout a fight with the nominee of the Prime Minister, and that nominee, too, his son. It spoke of Disraeli's literary abilities and local connections, and declared he was a man of talent. 'We do not concur,' said the *Herald*, 'politically with either of the gentlemen, but we prefer most decidedly the independent and manly declarations of Mr. Disraeli to the puling protestations of Col. Grey. We fairly weigh the merits of the two, and the scale preponderates towards Mr. Disraeli most powerfully.'[1] On a subsequent occasion, the same journal remarked: 'In Mr. Disraeli we see talent, honesty of intention (wrongly directed), and perfect independence. Moreover, we admire his thorough instinctive and undisguised hatred of Whigs and Whiggery.' On June 13th the candidates made their public entry into the town which each aspired to represent. Disraeli, who it must be conceded was in his younger days somewhat given to display, made his entrance in a carriage drawn by four horses, surrounded by a cheering crowd of his admirers, and preceded by a brass band. As he drove through the streets he was enthusiastically received, and that fact seems to have stirred the bile of the Whig organ; for it records, with a petty spitefulness of phrase which is highly amusing, that Disraeli 'blew kisses,' or kissed his hand 'to all the females at the windows.'[2] Arrived at the 'Red Lion,' his electioneering head-quarters, Disraeli mounted the roof of the porch, and thence addressed the crowd in

[1] *Bucks. Herald*, June 16th, 1832.

[2] The paragraph in the *Bucks. Gazette* of June 16th, 1832, is worth quoting; for notwithstanding the strong antagonism of the paper to Mr. Disraeli, it cannot avoid remarking that he manifested 'some ability.' Under the head of *High Wycombe*, it says:—'The town remained in a state of quiescence until Wednesday, the day appointed for the entry of the other candidate (Mr. Disraeli), who was met at the "Bird-in-Hand" by his friends . . . The candidate, who while passing through the town stood in an open carriage drawn by four horses, accompanied by two of his brothers, and a friend or two, kissed his hand, or blew kisses, we cannot say which, to all the females who were at the windows; bowing profoundly at times to his friends. After this harlequinade had been performed, Mr. Disraeli addressed the populace from the top of the portico at the door of the "Lion" inn, and in a speech of some ability, and with much gesticulation, amused the gaping throng for little more than an hour. The worthy gentleman certainly displayed a great deal of what Demosthenes said formed the chief parts of an orator, action—action—action,—for with him all was *action* . . .

an animated speech, in which neither the Whigs in general nor his opponents in particular were spared. Of this oration the *Gazette* records that it was 'a speech of some ability and much gesticulation;' while the *Herald* writes of it as 'replete with talent, delivered with



great energy, and producing a powerful effect.' The dandyism of Disraeli's appearance (of which a good idea may be gleaned from the accompanying illustration) would not, we may be sure, be allowed

. . . The orator candidate read some publications which had appeared from the other party, on which he made many sarcastic remarks, and now and then a good hit. He enquired whether he looked like an atheist? From what we have since learnt, the oration did not make much for the candidate in the minds of the more reflecting part of his auditors. From a solitary specimen we would not venture to give a decided opinion of Mr. Disraeli's style of speaking; that he possesses some talent it would be folly to deny; but whether of the description to fit him to become one of the "most potent, grave, and reverend" senators of England, many may doubt, and it will be for the men of Wycombe to decide.'

to pass unnoticed by a political organ of the calibre of the *Bucks. Gazette.* His 'coat lined with pink silk,' 'the blue band round his hat,' his 'black cane with a gold head,' his 'ringlets,' the 'lace at his bosom and the cambric at his wrists,' are each and all enumerated; and, in a burst of frenzy, the atrabilious reporter even went so far as to call Disraeli 'a popinjay,' which was vulgar, and 'an Adonis of the sable cheek,' which is incomprehensible.

The paper added, 'We understand that this smart gentleman flew into his tantrums, and abused all parties but the Tories. He at last, however, became more resigned, and only heaved a deep sigh on a pretended friend, and a wag observed to him "that he was glad to see him well *laced,* but he had perhaps better not be so *ruffled* on another occasion."' The *Bucks. Herald,* replying at a subsequent period to the sneers of its contemporary at Disraeli's personal appearance, says, 'Mr. Disraeli *does* indulge in clean linen, although it is not every candidate who is equally particular, and our contemporary attacks not his reasoning but his ruffles. Mr. Disraeli too labours under the awkward embarrassment of a good head of hair, and he is *gazetted* not for his logic but for his locks.'

The nomination took place on the 20th June; and, as it was now known that this would be the last election under the old franchise, the excitement was great. Disraeli was the first nominated, his proposer being Mr. Treacher, a Tory; and his seconder Mr. King, a Radical; and he was consequently the first of the two candidates to address the electors from hustings erected outside the town hall, the nomination having been made in the hall itself. Confident, as usual, Disraeli spoke boldly and well. He defended himself from a charge made by the *Gazette* that he had 'intruded himself on the borough.' He had, he declared, first ascertained that there was no local candidate coming forward, and had then only presented himself to the electors; a course in which he thought himself justified,[1] 'considering that he was their neighbour, that he had to the best of his capacity cultivated the poor powers nature had given him, that he had

[1] *Bucks. Gazette,* June 30, 1832.

latterly much studied politics, that he was acquainted with most of the states and most statesmen; that he had a moderate but sufficient independence; considering also that he had never received one shilling of public money, that he belonged to a family who never had, that he had no possible or contingent interest in abuses; considering these things, he presented himself, and he thought he could exercise as much to their advantage the political knowledge he had acquired, as could another what he might have become possessed of by hereditary intuition.'

Having neatly rapped the knuckles of the Greys, who no doubt had received a considerable amount of 'public money,'—the nepotism of Earl Grey was criticised even in that age of acknowledged favouritism—Disraeli turned to the question of reform. 'Reform was' he remarked, 'a means to a great end. He expected to derive from it financial, ecclesiastic, and legal reform. These were the measures he would promote and pursue. He would also seek the amelioration of the condition of the poor. Some measure of that kind he would introduce. Without such amelioration the country could not exist. Minor details he would not go into. His principle was, that the happiness of the many must be preferred to the happiness of the few.' So soon as the nomination was over, the polling commenced. It was not, as our readers will suppose from our account of the numerical strength of the constituency, a very tedious process, and it soon became evident that government, and family influence, had borne down talent, eloquence, and courage. At five o'clock, Disraeli, seeing that his chance was hopeless, retired. The poll at the close was, Grey 23, Disraeli 12; majority 11; and the *Bucks. Gazette* notes triumphantly, that 'there were two men to poll in the Grey interest.' So soon as the poll was declared, Disraeli addressed the crowd in a speech which certainly did not err on the side of lack of vigour. He attacked Lord Nugent with much bitterness; he charged Sir Thomas Baring with a breach of agreement; he scarified the *Bucks. Gazette;* and, in short, 'hit out all round,' in a manner which demonstrated that if defeated, he was not at all

daunted. Sir Thomas Baring and Lord Nugent were shouted down when they attempted to reply. So far as popularity went, Disraeli had the advantage, and it was evident that if he carried out his threat, of coming forward again at the next election, the Whigs would have to fight hard to retain the seat they had just managed to win; and that the next election must take place at an early date, and with an enlarged constituency, both parties were well aware. For the present, however, Disraeli had failed; but with him, as his opponents afterwards learned, failure was but the precursor of victory.

CHAPTER VII.

DEFEATED BUT NOT DAUNTED.

'In the lexicon of youth, which fate reserves
For a bright manhood, there is no such word
As—FAIL.'—*Lytton.*

IN the natural order of events the time soon arrived when Disraeli could once more try his strength against his Whig opponents in the borough of High Wycombe. The Reform Bill was, as we have seen, passed on 17th June, 1832, and an appeal to the new constituencies was only delayed until the routine and indispensable business of parliament could be got through, and some other matters arranged preparatory to the dissolution. On the 16th of August, parliament was prorogued, and preparations began to be made for the general election; for, as the machinery was in many respects novel, and the voters themselves inexperienced, a good deal of preparatory work was necessary. On the 1st October, Disraeli issued his address. It was a remarkable document, if only for the boldness with which the Whigs were attacked, and the unsparing manner in which the nepotism of the Premier and of other Whig magnates was exposed and denounced. The second paragraph of the address, and that which immediately follows, are devoted to the abuses of the 'nomination' method of getting young and aspiring Whigs into parliament; and Disraeli then goes on, 'I come forward to oppose this disgusting system of factious and intrinsic nomination, which, if successful, must be fatal to your local independence; and which, if extensively acted upon throughout the country, may even be destructive of your general liberty. I come forward wearing the badge of no party, and the livery of no faction. I seek your suffrages as an inde-

pendent neighbour, who, sympathising with your wants and interests, will exercise his utmost influence in the great national council to relieve the one and support the other.' Disraeli then expresses his opinion that the ballot is needed as a preservative against terrorism, and declares his belief that parliaments should be triennial, and that the taxes on knowledge should be repealed; taking care, too, we may note, to point out that it was the Whigs who substituted seven instead of three years for the duration of a parliament, and that the Tories opposed the proposal. After touching on some other points, Disraeli once more turns upon the object of his persistent hatred—the Whig party. 'And now,' he writes, 'I call upon every man who values the independence of our borough—upon every man who desires the good government of this once great and happy country—upon every man who feels that he has a better chance of being faithfully served by a member who is his neighbour, than by a remote representative, who, like the idle wind which no one regardeth, comes one day we know not whence, and goes the next we know not whither—to support me in this struggle against the rapacious, tyrannical, and incapable faction, who, having knavishly obtained power by false pretences, sillily suppose they will be permitted to retain it by half measures; and who, in the course of their brief but disastrous career, have contrived to shake every great interest of the empire to its centre.' The address concludes by a spirited appeal to the electors to 'rid themselves of all that political jargon and factious slang of Whig and Tory—two names with one meaning, used only to delude you—and unite in forming a great *national party* which can alone preserve the country from destruction.' It will thus be seen that the address does not bear out the assertion so often made that Disraeli contested Wycombe as a Radical. He says decisively that he is not an adherent of any party or faction, and calls on the electors to disregard the party nicknames of Whig and Tory. Some of the opinions which Disraeli held, he no doubt held in common with many Radicals; but, again, he stoutly opposed some of the pet crotchets of that party. He

always professed his belief that the true and proper leaders of the people were the aristocracy; and expressed, too, his conviction that the power of the crown was unduly limited, just as the power of the mass of the people had on the other hand been unfairly curtailed; and those were assuredly not doctrines which would have found favour with Radical politicians then any more than they do now. Disraeli was, in fact, a democratic Tory; he had a deep sympathy with the people, he saw with indignation that the Reform Bill had practically deprived them of political power; but he staunchly upheld, too, the rights of the crown; and insisted that the union of church and state was necessary to our national well-being. Above all, he hated the Whigs, whom he regarded as a selfish faction bent solely on the maintenance of their own influence and power. How such a man could be called a Radical it is somewhat difficult to explain, except on the hypothesis that it was intended to injure Disraeli's good name by showing him in the light of a political turncoat; it being apparently thought by some that for a politician to become more Conservative in his opinions as he advances in years and experience is peculiarly disgraceful; while should he happen to develop rapidly in the direction of Radicalism of the most extreme type, words are not to be found strong enough to paint his virtues. Even if it were proved that Disraeli held in 1832 opinions which he afterwards abandoned, the change would be neither singular nor discreditable; but, as a matter of fact, Disraeli professed at this time much the same political creed that he did to the end of his life; and was quite as much 'a Radical,' when in 1867 he gave back to the masses the political rights of which the Whigs had deprived them, as he was when he stood for Chipping Wycombe in 1832.

On the 3rd December parliament was dissolved, and the election fight, which had been waged at Wycombe with vigour since October 1st, broke out with additional spirit. The organ of the Whigs discharged on the devoted head of Disraeli column after column of abuse. All the machinery of electioneering was brought into requisition, and exciting meetings were held. Amongst other politi-

cal gatherings, there was a public dinner, given to Disraeli by his supporters and friends, at which the candidate delivered a speech that is worthy of note, as showing pretty conclusively, by the manner in which it was received, the estimation in which he was held by many electors; and as establishing a fact which may be referred to later on, viz., that even thus early Disraeli was a fluent, powerful, and practised speaker. The dinner was given in the Guildhall; two hundred persons sat down to it, and of these one hundred and sixty were electors.[1] Mr. John Carter occupied the chair, and in proposing the toast of 'the health of Mr. Disraeli,' he paid a tribute to the abilities and character of the candidate, which shows that even then Disraeli possessed that power of making warm friends which was a characteristic of his to the last. The chairman declared that though they had seen a great deal of Mr. Disraeli, 'yet such was their admiration that they could not see too much.' 'He came amongst us,' continued Mr. Carter, 'unaided by influence, unsupported by any man in this room, or in this town, and made his way to his present popularity solely by his talent and genius;' and then the speaker made an observation which showed the strong impression then entertained as to Disraeli's abilities. 'We are not,' said he, 'sending a cypher to parliament, but a man who will make Wycombe famous for its patriotism, and the conduct of its representative.' Unfortunately, Wycombe missed the honour of sending Disraeli to parliament, but it is indisputable that the little town owes a good deal of such celebrity as it possesses to the fact that Benjamin Disraeli thrice essayed to gain its suffrages.

When the candidate rose to reply he was received with 'enthusiastic cheering,' which was renewed at short intervals during the delivery of his speech.[2] Dispensing with lengthy preliminaries, Disraeli quickly came to the political questions of the day. Starting from the proposition that 'all concessions to our popular rights had been occasioned by the rival intrigues of aristocratic factions,' he went on to show that neither of the great parties could hope to gain and retain power

[1] *Wycombe Sentinel*, November 30th, 1832. [2] *Ibid.*

except by putting themselves at the head of some popular impulse, and becoming the exponents of the popular will. 'Thus,' said Disraeli, 'the Whigs of the present day, affecting to originate an inevitable result, had seated themselves in power; which he trusted they would not enjoy so long as the Tories,'—a remark which was received with loud cheers. Turning then to the charges made against himself, Disraeli explained at considerable length his opinions. He had, he remarked, been described 'in the great organ of the Whig government' as 'a destructive Radical, aiming to attain power by a reckless system of destructive pledges;' yet five months earlier that same organ had called him a 'disappointed Tory.' He was, he added, 'unchanged,' and advocated as a destructive Radical precisely the same measures he had advocated as a disappointed Tory. He then proceeded to recommend triennial parliaments, the ballot—which he termed a Conservative measure,—and the abolition of slavery. On the question of the corn laws Disraeli gave out a somewhat uncertain sound; for at this period of his career he had probably not made up his mind in respect to what was then regarded as a most difficult and complicated subject. He did, however, say enough to show that he was not at one with the Radicals on the question. 'Reduce,' said he, 'the burdens which press so heavily upon the farmer, and then reduce his protection in the same ratio;' a sentiment which appears to have been well received. A rapid sketch of the characters of the members of Earl Grey's cabinet, which followed, is curious, bearing, as it does, a strong resemblance in tone and style to some of those tremendous philippics which Disraeli delivered against Sir R. Peel in subsequent years. 'It is impossible,' says the reporter from whose account we have quoted before,[1] 'to convey any idea of the almost continued roar of laughter in which he kept the whole hall while he described the consistency of Lord Grey and the constant devotion to the popular cause of the three Secretaries of State: Lord Palmerston, Lord Goderich, and Lord Melbourne, and some of their colleagues. 'Who,' said Mr. Disraeli,

[1] *Wycombe Sentinel*, November 30th, 1832.

'were the present ministry? One would suppose they had sprung from a newly-hatched egg of political purity. Who were they who started back in agonized fear when they learnt the people of Wycombe would support an humble individual in preference to the son of the Prime Minister, that gallant gentleman who lately burst forth in the columns of the *Times* newspaper like a rocket at Vauxhall? First, we had the consistent Premier, Lord Grey, who would not join Mr. Canning's administration because he was flirting with the Duke of Wellington. He who so nobly advocated the corn laws, and his "order." He was a reformer in truth! He shook hands, too, the other day with Mr. Thelwell, whom he had invariably cut for the last forty years. Let him have all the benefits of his consistency, but let us add that, had he been a reformer for a shorter period, we should have had more belief in his sincerity than when he talks of his forty years wandering in the desert of political despair. Next we had my Lord Palmerston. He was, very possibly, a sincere reformer now, who during his whole career invariably voted against every proposition for reform and retrenchment,—he, the thick-and-thin friend of Lord Castlereagh,—he, who held office under Lord Castlereagh during all the period of his misrule; it was certainly just possible he was now a sincere reformer. Next came my Lord Goderich,—he, worthy man, droops his eyes and wrings his hands at the memory of past mis-government,—yes, he who, when Mr. Robinson, signed his protocols at the foot of Lord Castlereagh, and who publicly announced that he had "no greater ambition than to go down to posterity with the noble lord" (Castlereagh). Who now was the Tory in disguise? The third secretary could be convicted of nothing. Lord Melbourne was a "mild Whig," who systematically ratted from his slight connection on all great Tory divisions, and was known by the name of the "Provisional Rat," because he always supported the Whigs, provided the Tories were not in danger. Then came the Duke of Richmond, assuredly a choice Whig; he was the pupil of Pitt, and entirely identified with the Tories until he was refused the Order of the Garter, and then his pique termi-

nates in patriotism, and he becomes the Whig Postmaster-General. Charles Grant might be called the forlorn hope of a falling party. He was an indolent man, but, when hard pushed for a flourishing declamation, the Tories were accustomed to hurry him down to the House if they could rouse him from his state of proverbial indolence, and he then trumpeted forth, in hard language, a furious harangue, or a passionate invective. And these were the men who were shocked at his audacity in opposing the election of the son of the Prime Minister, and daring for a moment to resist the tyrannical progress of the Whig oligarchy!'

We can well understand that this caustic summary of the qualifications of the Grey cabinet would come with peculiar force at such a moment; and it must be admitted that, making due allowance for a little natural exaggeration, Disraeli's estimate does not appear now-a-days to have been a very erroneous one. In spite, however, of the hearty reception Disraeli met with at the banquet of which we have just spoken, and on many other occasions, his chances of success were not brilliant. There was an immense amount of influence to be struggled against; the bulk of the constituency were Whigs, who had as little sympathy with Disraeli's so-called Radical proclivities as they had with his Tory principles; and who regarded 'the national party,' which the young candidate spoke of so eloquently, as a mere wild and foolish dream not worthy the consideration of practical men. We shall find that a little later in his career, Disraeli put forward a rather elaborate account of the 'national party' he wished to see established; and we may regard the 'Young England' movement of later years as the natural outcome of the idea, which, even at this time, shaped itself in his mind. The election was fixed for the 18th December, when Disraeli was proposed by the Mr. Carter whom we have seen presiding at the election dinner (who was generally regarded as the ally of the Marquis of Chandos), and seconded by Mr. Treacher. The *Bucks. Gazette* has nearly a column of Mr. Disraeli's speech, which he delivered standing upon a chair, and which, the same paper says, 'was enthusiastically cheered

by his party.' Of Disraeli's two opponents, one, Mr. Smith, afterwards Lord Carington, was by general consent certain of being returned, as he had represented the town for some years, had great local influence, and was personally popular; so that the real fight lay, as on the previous occasion, between Disraeli and Colonel Grey. At the show of hands the future Premier had the advantage, and during the polling he kept remarkably well up. Slowly, however, Colonel Grey went ahead, and when the poll was declared at the end of the second day, the numbers were—Smith 179, Grey 140, Disraeli 119. It appears from the files of the Bucks. papers, to which we have referred, that after the nomination there was, amid the excitement that prevailed, some of the rough 'horse play' so commonly to be met with where opposing crowds are gathered together. Mr. Disraeli was, it is stated, engaged in a skirmish with some of his opponents; his cane was broken against a tombstone in the churchyard, and he was thrown down in the mud, eventually taking refuge at the house of a supporter.

Thus, once more, had fortune shewn herself adverse to Disraeli; but he was not a man to bate one jot of heart or hope while a chance remained. With all his fiery energy, he was a man of wonderful patience; and he now quietly waited in the confident expectation that the whirligig of time would bring him other chances. Indeed, there was at one moment a very fair prospect of his contesting the county. After his defeat at Wycombe, he had received a requisition which he says[1] had been signed 'within less than forty-eight hours' by nearly six hundred freeholders. Probably the expense of such a contest kept him back; for though he had, as he stated, a 'moderate independence,' he was by no means a rich man, and his contests for Wycombe had no doubt been a serious drain on his resources. He did, however, go over to Aylesbury, and was a prominent figure there on the day of nomination. He was himself nominated, but did not go to the poll, though his invitation to Aylesbury shewed that he had at this time obtained a strong position

[1] In a letter to the *Times*, December 27th, 1832.

in the county. The *Bucks. Gazette* states that when Disraeli presented himself 'there was at once an uproar of the most extravagant description,' supplemented by cries of 'Tory Radical,' 'Radical Tory,' and 'Mountebank orator.' Disraeli was not, however, to be put down by clamour. He denounced the opposition to him as 'circumspect and cowardly,' words which were at once resented by Mr. John Abel Smith, who, says the Whig organ,[1] 'rushed forward, and springing on the table went up to Mr. Disraeli, to whom he addressed one or two words Some gentlemen immediately interfered, and the whole meeting became much excited.' From the tenour of Disraeli's reply, some allusion had probably been made to his personal circumstances, for he remarked, 'I never before heard of a county court being converted into a court of chivalry;' and offered to give privately to any individual who might consider himself aggrieved 'a satisfactory reply.' As we hear nothing more of the matter, we may suppose that the young Whig who had assailed Disraeli 'thought better of it.' This little breeze over, Disraeli at last got a hearing. He explained at length why he was obliged to decline a contest for the county; made a savage attack on the Whigs; and concluded an animated speech amidst loud and hearty cheering, a tribute not the less to his talents and opinions than to the plucky way in which he had stood up against the attempts to prevent him speaking at all. Some very interesting reminiscences, evidently of this Aylesbury meeting, have recently been made public. Speaking shortly after Lord Beaconsfield's lamented death, at a meeting in Nottingham, the Rev. the Hon. Canon Forester made the following remarks, which we need make no apology for quoting in full:—[2]

'About forty-eight years ago, as near as he could recollect, and when he was only a young man, he was staying with a brother-in-law in Buckinghamshire, when there was an election, he believed, at Aylesbury. One of the family of Smiths, who were respected bankers in Nottingham, was the person who was about to be presented to the electors, and he (Mr. Forester) attended the meeting. Mr. Smith was proposed

[1] *Bucks. Gazette*, December 22, 1832.
[2] *Vide* report in *Nottingham Guardian*, April 29th, 1881.

and seconded, and it appeared as if he would be elected without opposition; but there arose in one part of the assembly-hall a very humble looking young man, whom he had never seen before. He had bushy hair and curly locks, and was dressed in a frock coat, such as was generally worn by gentlemen of that day, but it was covered with fur. He rose to speak,—not upon the same side to which the gentleman about to be elected spoke,—and it was the signal for all manner of cat-calls, hisses, and discordant sounds; and the bulk of those present declined to hear him. He stood his ground, however, and when there was a little lull in the storm he began again, but that was only the signal for a recommencement of the discordant sounds. Not to be done, however, he jumped upon the table in the middle of the hall; and this, of course, was the signal for increased disorder. But he was determined to be heard, and he was heard, and made, for a young man perhaps of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old, a good speech, which was listened to in great silence; for, to use a common expression, they could have heard a pin drop. He (the speaker) met the same gentleman in a private house some six years ago or more, and he then reminded him of the story of how they first met; and that gentleman he need scarcely tell them was the Right Hon. Lord Beaconsfield. He should also like to relate another anecdote which he heard Lord Beaconsfield tell in the same house at dinner. That was before he entered parliament, and the story was related by himself. He stated that while in Wycombe he was acquainted with a very clever lady and authoress, who asked him to dine at her house and meet a number of persons, among them being Lord Melbourne, who was afterwards Prime Minister, and who at that time was a member of Lord Grey's Government. The lady had asked Benjamin Disraeli to meet Lord Melbourne in the hope that possibly he might take an interest in him and give him a situation as clerk in some office or other, and that the appointment might lead to something higher for the young man, who had already written things that had been acceptable to the public; also, that he might be drawn from the side he then favoured to that side which Lord Melbourne favoured. They had some conversation, and Lord Melbourne said, "What are your intentions with regard to the future—what do you propose doing?" Well, he (Disraeli) said he thought it was rather forward even in Lord Melbourne to put such a question, and so he said he thought within himself, "How shall I answer?" and then remarked, "Oh, I mean to be Prime Minister,"—but Lord Melbourne turned upon his heels, thinking the matter ridiculous. Lord Melbourne was the next Prime Minister, and although he did not expect it, he lived to see Mr. Disraeli the Chancellor of the Exchequer.'

But to return to the Aylesbury meeting, and to the events which succeeded it. After the nomination speech, Disraeli was for a time very quiet. He spoke occasionally, however; and it is to be noted that his opinions in favour of the necessity for the maintenance of the corn laws, and of some efficient relief to the farming interest, appear more pronounced; and we shall presently find that he has

become an ardent Protectionist; not, as has been asserted, for the sake of gaining popularity, but from honest conviction. We are now-a-days so accustomed to hear protection denounced as absurd, that we are apt to suppose that no man of sense would uphold it; but it was not so in those days, and Disraeli had numbers of eminent men to bear him company when he advocated the retention of a duty on corn, and amongst them was Sir Robert Peel himself. For the present, however, we may suppose that Disraeli resigned himself to being 'out of the House,' but he keenly watched events, and we shall soon again find him in the thick of the fray, and at length, after more failures, emerging triumphant.

CHAPTER VIII.

'WHAT IS HE?'—AN INQUIRY.

'A brave man struggling in the storms of fate.'—*Pope.*

HE that would live free of envy,' says L'Estrange, 'must lay his finger upon his mouth, and keep his hand out of the ink-pot.' Few men have probably experienced the truth of this earlier in life than did Benjamin Disraeli. It was evidently not in his nature to practise either one or the other of these prudent precautions. Nor did he ever care to do so. He had recourse to the *ink-pot*, however, long before he began to keep his finger from his *mouth*, in communicating, that is, with the public mind of his country.

It was, doubtless, the indications he so early gave of attaining a high political position that excited the envy and provoked the misrepresentations of his Whig assailants, and of his Radical opponents subsequently, when they failed to draw him into their camp—finding he was firm and faithful in his resolution, first and above all things, to maintain intact the institutions of the country.

That this cardinal principle might be the more determinedly asserted, and the course he had taken in the furtherance of it the more clearly understood, he issued, in 1833, as an amplification of his Wycombe speech, a remarkable *brochure* entitled 'What Is He?' intended to be literally, in fact, such an answer to the question, he himself being the individual it referred to, as might make it perfectly intelligible, to his numerous critics and to the public, what he really was, what were the politics he professed, and what the political objects he had in view. In doing this he contended, in some striking passages, that 'the aristocratic principle had been

destroyed in this country, not so much by the Reform Act itself as by the means by which the Reform Act had been passed;' and then, advocating a restoration of the democratic principle to its legitimate place, he thus forcibly pointed the moral of his startling contention: 'He is a mean-spirited wretch who is restrained from doing his duty by the fear of being held up as inimical and inconsistent by those who are incapable of forming an opinion on public affairs, and who, were it not for the individual inconsistency which they brand, would often become the victims of their own incapacity and ignorance. He who will not profess opinions without examining them is ever considered insincere by the mass who adopt doctrines without thought, and retain them with the obstinacy which ignorance can alone impose. The insincere and the inconsistent are the stupid and the vile. Let us not forget also an influence which is too much underrated in this age of boasted mediocrity—the influence of individual character. Great spirits may yet arise to guide the groaning helm through the world of troubled waters: spirits whose proud destiny it may still be at the same time to maintain the glory of the empire and to secure the happiness of the people.' Still more plainly, but less startlingly, does he explain himself when he adds, further on: 'A Tory and a Radical I can understand; a Whig—a democratic aristocrat — I cannot comprehend. If the Tories indeed despair of restoring the aristocratic principle, and are sincere in their avowal that the state cannot be governed with the present machinery, it is their duty to coalesce with the Radicals, and permit both political nick-names to mingle in the common, the intelligible, and dignified title of a National Party.'

And then he comes to the inquiry—'What are the concise and most obvious methods by which the democratic principle may be made predominant?' to which he thus, perhaps more tersely than satisfactorily, replies: 'It would appear that the easiest and the most obvious methods are, the instant repeal of the Septennial Act, the institution of election by ballot, and the immediate dissolution

of parliament.' It is evident from this, that he considered it an indispensable preliminary to '*dish the Whigs!*' And why? Because, as he contended, the Whigs had, by their artful treatment of the Reform Bill, impaired, if not destroyed, what the constitution had provided for its own preservation: 'that is,' as Paley, in his 'Political Philosophy,' so well explains it, 'in what manner each part of the legislature is secured, in the exercise of the powers assigned to it, from the encroachment of the other parts; this security being sometimes called the *balance of the constitution;* and the political equilibrium which the phrase denotes consists in two contrivances—a balance of power, and a balance of interest. By a balance of power is meant that there is no power possessed by any part of the legislature the abuse or excess of which is not checked by some antagonistic power residing in another part;' whilst 'by the balance of interest, which accompanies and gives efficacy to the balance of power, is meant this—that the respective interests of the three estates of the empire are so disposed and adjusted, that whichever of the three shall attempt any encroachment, the other two will unite in resisting it.'[1] Thus it is evident that Disraeli's views were hostile alike to those of Whig and Radical.

Mr. Disraeli's ideas of the democracy, as a constitutional element in the state, were far from indicating any exclusively *Radical* inclination, or any political *crotchet* whatever. And in proof of this we shall be excused, we trust, for here quoting a few apposite remarks on the body politic from the able work of a late eminent Oxford professor of political philosophy. He is describing the two elementary divisions in the constitution of the state, when he observes: 'These elements are distinct; they are almost antagonistic to each other. One is impressed with the character of stability, repose, exclusiveness, dread of innovation, adherence to prescription. It is bent more on the honourable than on the useful; is an assertor of general principles; is arrogant, perhaps, yet not without virtue and benevolence in its pride; contemptuous of mere money, and

[1] Paley's 'Political Philosophy.' Chapter vii.

of occupations connected with gain; a favourer of agriculture, as linked with the possession of land, and this with territorial jurisdiction; jealous of the church, when the church would rival its own temporal prerogatives, yet attached to it as a supporter of order, and as inspired with a spirit analagous to its own. It maintains the monarchy, not merely as an expedient political arrangement, but as involving its own principles of hereditary ranks; and still more from that habitual reverence for others which is nurtured in those who are objects of reverence themselves. And its feeling towards the classes beneath them, if sometimes mixed with jealousy and disdain of the more aspiring and presuming, is chastened into liberality and benevolence towards their dependants and the poor. The other, the democratic element, is full of activity. It is enterprising, bold, sanguine, fond of advancement and changes, slighting antiquity, containing forms and positive institutions, measuring distinctions by personal excellence, hasty in its plans, prone to speculation, vague and diffusive in its benevolence, devoted to the acquirement of wealth, attached more to the monied than the agricultural interest, a schemer in education, incapable of understanding the importance of religious establishments, confounding positive creeds with philosophical dogmas, the advocate of opinion as opposed to traditional revelation, a clamourer for liberty in doctrine as in trade, a foe to all the ceremonials of society, an opponent of everything which is not simple, uniform, perspicuous, and unbalanced.'[1] Such are the two bodies politic, graphically described and accurately defined: the aristocratic and the democratic as elements of the constitution. They are obviously of two distinct and opposite characters. 'One body,' as the learned professor further shows, 'is located and guaranteed in possession of privileges from their birth: the other is engaged in the pursuit of them. One has to maintain; the other has to acquire. And when brought together into one body of the state, how are they to be harmonised?' This was the problem that Disraeli, from the outset of his political career, evidently sought to solve.

[1] Sewell's 'Christian Politics.'

The Whigs had disturbed their amalgamation, if not destroyed their harmony. They had put each of the two distinctive elements out of that 'authentic place' which was originally assigned them respectively, and their occupation of which was indispensable to their maintenance of harmony and peace; for, as the nation's immortal bard has truly and forcibly expressed it:—

> 'Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And hark, what discord follows! Each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy!'

As so it did, 'dividing and cracking, rending and deracinating,' the very Cabinet itself that had done it all, and necessitating a dissolution of its new-born parliament almost before it had learnt the A B C of its routine.

A very opposite policy to that of the Whigs could be perceived to underlie Mr. Disraeli's very first public utterances on politics; although it is not to be denied that he did not always avoid exposing himself to misapprehension, and to the charge of leading many a Radical to suppose he was at heart one of themselves; while the Whigs, evidently more wily, though probably not more discerning, adroitly made a handle of it, and strove to turn it against him. It is the remark of a foreigner, who, though such, was yet the author of a dissertation on the 'Constitution of England,' which, for at least a century, has remained a standard work on the subject, that it is 'the stability of the governing executive authority in England, and the weight it gives to the whole machine of the state, that have enabled the English nation, considered as a free nation, to enjoy several advantages which would really have been totally unattainable in the other states we have mentioned, whatever degree of public virtue we might even suppose to have belonged to the men who acted in those states as the advisers of the people, or, in general, who were entrusted with the business of framing the laws. And one of the advantages resulting from the solidity of the government,' he adds, 'is the extraordinary personal freedom which all ranks of individuals in England enjoy at the expense of

the governing authority'[1]—a degree and a quality of freedom that is certainly not exceeded, if even equalled, in any other state in the civilized world. And it was the source and the security of that inestimable boon which it was all along Mr. Disraeli's great object to maintain and to perpetuate. And his method of doing this was clearly and emphatically, though, as some might think but tritely, and certainly somewhat tersely, declared on a public occasion, at about the period of his early life we have been referring to:—'*I am a Conservative to preserve all that is good in our constitution, a Radical to remove all that is bad.*'[2]

Two several defeats as a candidate for High Wycombe by no means disheartened our young aspirant for political eminence. He never complained of his defeats, or felt discouragement under them, but invariably showed that spirit of self-assurance, that heartfelt confidence, that steady patience, together with that indomitable courage, amid all his vicissitudes, which ever contributed, no doubt, most materially to his brilliant success in public life. 'I have made two struggles,' he said, at a public dinner, after his second defeat, 'for the independence of High Wycombe; and I am prepared, if the opportunity offers, to make a third. I am not at all disheartened. I don't in any way feel like a beaten man. Perhaps it is because I am used to it, and I can almost say, with the famous Italian general, who, being asked in his old age why he was always victorious, replied because he had always been beaten in his youth.' They were defeats, in fact, which served rather to stimulate his ambition; as, certainly, they afforded him opportunities of exhibiting and defending his political principles, which he had not failed to turn to good account in gradually establishing his own reputation, and decidedly serving the constitutional cause. Assailed, too, as he was so persistently and so unscrupulously, they were opportunities which he could appropriate most opportunely and most effectually in exposing the groundlessness of the aspersions with which he was

[1] Delolme on the British Constitution.

[2] Speech at a public dinner at High Wycombe, 1832.

assailed, and vindicating that policy, his advocacy of which had provoked them.

Another occasion of doing this arose by his being invited to be a candidate, in April 1833, for the metropolitan borough of Marylebone. In response to this invitation he issued an address to the electors which was very similar in its character to that delivered on the hustings at Wycombe, and which, therefore, it is not necessary for us to quote. He had still refrained from attaching himself to either of the two great political parties, though several plausible overtures, it is understood, were from time to time made to him to do so; and at Marylebone as at Wycombe, letters of recommendation had been published from both Radical and Independent members in furtherance of his candidature—among others from Mr. Hume, M.P., and Mr. O'Connell, M.P.; though it is evident, from the terms of their letters, that they had no authority to introduce him as a Radical, or even a Liberal, at least in their sense of those words—the salient point of Mr. Hume's epistle being but the expression of his hopes that 'as a Reformer he should be happy to see Mr. Disraeli a member of the new Parliament;' while O'Connell's was, in the main, no more than an expression of his conviction 'of the grand advantage the cause of genuine reform would obtain by Mr. Disraeli's return, from the assurance he had of Mr. Disraeli's readiness to carry the Reform Bill into practical effect, enhanced by the talent and information he brings to the good cause.' Much bitter controversy afterwards arose out of these letters, more particularly O'Connell's, which we shall have to notice hereafter. But one thing that was brought to light, and which they did not fail to prove, beyond all reasonable dispute, was this—that Disraeli was not, as they had hoped, either a Radical or a Liberal, or, indeed, at that time, a party man at all.

The Marylebone candidature came to nothing, from the expected vacancy not taking place. But although he was then prevented from explaining on the hustings the principles on which he rested his claim to represent in parliament that large metropolitan constituency,

he promptly adopted other means of doing so, and perhaps more effectually—no doubt more deliberately, and probably more soberly—through the agency of the press. It gave him the opportunity, too, of explaining more fully, and more clearly, than perhaps he had yet done, the real nature of his political opinions, their constitutional character, and their patriotic object. Such evidences as these must have presented of Disraeli's true political principles could not fail, one would think, in exposing the fallacies which the Radicals had put forth in pretended justification of their recommendation of him as a candidate of really their own kidney, if not ostensibly of their own party. With some of the leaders of the party it may be readily believed, 'the wish was father of the thought;' while others had so eagerly jumped to the conclusion, that because, perhaps too good-naturedly, he accepted Radical testimonies as to 'the advantage the course of genuine reform would obtain by his return to parliament, and assurances of how much his exertions would be enhanced by the talent and information he would bring to the good cause;'—all which was perfectly true as applied to his own professions of *constitutional* reform, though certainly not, as one might have thought the Radicals must know, of the class of reforms that it was the ultimate object of O'Connell and others to promote.

But as well as there being a critical pressure from impending political perils on Disraeli, forcing on him, as he thought, the unavoidable necessity of accepting at least temporary help from any political quarter for a purpose that was not only legitimate in its nature, but also patriotic in its object, some allowance might surely, in justice and fairness, be made for, comparatively speaking, the youth and inexperience of Disraeli at the time in question. It was about 1832–3, a period of very early manhood, and before much, if any, available opportunity had been afforded him of acquiring much practical experience in political action or party tactics. True, he had, as respects talent, already 'borne himself beyond the promise of his age. He had bettered his expectations.' But he had still 'the untainted virtue of his youth.' He had not ceased to be ingenuous,

as too many politicians not only do, but never do otherwise for all time to come. It is a time of life, moreover, naturally, when there is generally in the youthfully virtuous mind, more of the simplicity, if not the innocence, of the dove, than the wisdom or the wiliness of the serpent,—and in consequence of which early manhood, as an eminent philosopher and moralist has well observed, 'sometimes becomes culpable in many circumstances of life, and often discredits his best actions.'

Besides, in the case before us, there is the element of genius to be considered, and made allowance for, of which in his very youth Disraeli gave many indications, and lived to establish a claim to it that will never be disputed to the latest posterity to which his name and his fame will undoubtedly go down. And genius is a gift that has often its eccentricities, and sometimes even its infirmities, especially in early life, ere it is disciplined, sobered, and matured. Its display has frequently the effect, moreover, of provoking in a large and restless class of minds feelings of envy and malignity that are apt, for a time at least, to oppose and hinder its appreciation by the popular will. The saying of Swift, too, has in it probably more of truth than good manners, that 'when a true genius appears in the world, you may generally know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.' Politically this was remarkably illustrated in Disraeli's case, more particularly during his earlier efforts to propitiate the public mind, and even for a considerable time after he had succeeded in gaining a seat in parliament. On no occasion, perhaps, was it more conspicuous, or more inveterate, than when he made his memorable maiden-speech in the House of Commons,—of which we shall have the opportunity of saying more bye and bye.

A great handle was made by Mr. Disraeli's assailants, during the period we have been referring to, of his *alleged*, though by no means *apparent*, inconsistency. Youth, as we all know, is often inconsistent—even intelligent and talented youth—from its wildness and its inexperience. And it was from what had fallen from the lips

of Disraeli, and from his pen, ere he had much advanced beyond youthful life, that they pretended to find their grounds for charging him with being inconsistent. His own repudiation of the charge was pertinent and impressive. 'Gentlemen,' was his reiterated reply to them, 'if there be anything on which I pique myself, it is my consistency.' And then, whenever a derisive cheer, or a sceptical smile, might appear to imply a doubt of his sincerity, emphatically adding, 'Well, I shall be ready to prove that consistency in the House of Commons, or on the hustings. Every man may be attacked once; but no one ever attacked me twice,'—meaning thereby that when once he had repelled such attacks, they who individually had made them seldom or never had the hardihood to make them again, at least in his presence.

On other and later occasions he was enabled to appeal to facts, as well as have recourse to arguments, in proof not only of his consistency, but of those effects which no inconsistency could ever have produced. 'Gentlemen,' on one such occasion he said, 'had I but been a political adventurer, I had nothing to do but join the Whigs; but conscientiously believing that their policy was in every respect pernicious, I felt it my duty to oppose them. But how were they to be opposed? Where were the elements of a party to keep their government in check, and to bring back the old constitutional balance? I thought they existed in the Liberal-Tories, and in those independent Reformers who had been returned to parliament independently of the Whigs. I laboured for their union, and I am proud of it. Gentlemen, remember the Whig policy. They had a packed parliament. They had altered the duration of parliaments once before. I wished to break their strength by frequent elections, and frequent appeals to a misgoverned people; therefore I advocated a recurrence to those triennial parliaments which it was once the proudest boast of the Tories to advocate. I wished to give the country-gentlemen a chance of representing the neighbouring towns where they are esteemed, instead of being the nominees of a sectarian oligarchy. Therefore I proposed the adoption

of the ballot in the only constituencies willing to assume it. And now, where is my inconsistency? The mighty Whig party, which had consented to a revolution to gain place and power, fell to pieces. The object, therefore, for which I laboured is attained; the balance of parties is restored. And now, gentlemen, if I no longer advocate the measures in question, it is simply because they are no longer necessary.'[1]

If there was at this time any apparent inconsistency at all in the policy Disraeli was pursuing, it might be found, perhaps, in his opinions on the Irish Church, and by affinity, in some degree at least, the Church of England also. But this was a question which it was evident he had at that time only very superficially studied. He joined in the popular condemnation of the Irish tithe system, and in the scarcely less popular desire to reduce the dimensions of the Irish Church Establishment. But then, as regards tithes, it was not so much, after all, the principle of their institution that he found fault with as the perverted practice that prevailed in enforcing them. For in those days, it is on record, they constituted by such practices the great difficulty of the clergy themselves. They were what one of their severest critics has only too truly described them:—'The scandal of the Irish Church—the prominent part of the Irish problem; and their collection was attended with scenes of wild disorder and terrible cruelty, and sometimes with murderous encounters.'[2] Mr. Disraeli had thus, unhappily, but too good reason for declaring, in one of his addresses at High Wycombe: 'Twelve months, therefore, must not elapse without the very name of tithes in Ireland being abolished for ever;' at the same time more unreasonably adding, 'Nor do I deem it less urgent that the Protestant Establishment in that country should be at once proportioned to the population which it serves.' As respects the Church of England at that time, any expression of opinion was mainly, if not wholly, confined, it would appear, to the single subject of church-rates; and

[1] Speech to the electors of Taunton, in April, 1835.

[2] Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., in his 'Lord Beaconsfield: a Biography.'

this more with regard to the expediency than the principle of the point at issue. 'As for the question of church-rate,' he said on the same occasion, 'it is impossible that we can endure that every time one is levied a town should present the scene of a contested election. But the rights of the Establishment must be respected; though, for the sake of the Establishment itself, that flagrant scandal must be removed.' It is but fair to remember, however, that these crude, and no doubt hastily-formed opinions, whether as regards the Irish or the English Church, were those of half a century ago; and by one who, from his comparative youthfulness, and his manifest inexperience of church polity at that time, could have no matured and well-considered judgment on so important a question. We shall have occasion to show further on how differently he thought, and acted upon it, when the study of that polity, and his experience of it, as it affected the highest interests of the State and the welfare and happiness of society, both in England and Ireland, had correctly influenced his mind, and modified, if not transformed, his views.

'The world,' says Lord Macaulay, 'is full of institutions, which, though they never ought to have been set up, yet, having been set up, ought not to be rudely pulled down; for it is often wise in practice to be content with the mitigation of an abuse, which, looking at it in the abstract, we might feel impatient to destroy.' Not always literally, perhaps, but certainly substantially in the main, was the principle of this admonition advocated and acted upon by the Earl of Beaconsfield. And although it did not, in the eyes of some, exonerate him from vituperation, it yet, in the estimation of the discerning and the generous, gained him a political reputation, and secured him a social position of the noblest eminence, and the highest honour: thus most aptly realising and illustrating the glowing lines of the poet:—

> 'Whoe'er amidst the sons
> Of reason, valour, liberty, and virtue,
> Displays distinguished merit, is a noble
> Of Nature's own creating. Such have risen,
> Sprung from the dust; or where had been our honours?'

CHAPTER VIII.

AGRICULTURE AND POLITICS.

'Characters never change. Opinions alter—characters are only developed.'—*Disraeli.*

THE sentiment of the poet's lines with which the preceding chapter concluded was remarkably applicable to the case under consideration. Mr. Disraeli was evidently taking the initiative to rank among those—'the sons of reason, valour, liberty, and virtue'—who '*have risen,*' and have done so by their own 'distinguished merit.' He had sustained two defeats in seeking to obtain a seat in the great council of the nation. But 'he was not at all disheartened,' he told them at High Wycombe. 'He did not in any way feel like a beaten man.' He could bide his time. Although so far unsuccessful in finding access to that assembly, of which he afterwards became so bright an ornament, he had yet the satisfaction to find what he had foreseen, and had predicted,—*that* which, though through his own means alone of promoting it, had exposed him to misrepresentation and abuse,—was yet already on the eve, he thought, of coming to pass; and he was content to continue for a while longer outside the pale of that arena where his influence was, in due time, to be more powerfully, because more practically exerted, to carry out the patriotic policy he had determined to pursue. The Whigs were rapidly losing ground; and he did not now feel the need of any Radical co-operation to overthrow the authority to which they had, by plausibility and agitation, so unfortunately attained. It was in defence of those institutions the Whig reformers were seeking to revolutionize that Disraeli had, from the outset of his public career, begun to put forth his latent powers as an aspirant to political eminence; and they were institutions which he no doubt felt well assured would enable him,

in no long time, to secure the object of his high ambition. And well might the poet ask, 'or where had been our honours?'—where indeed, if such as he, 'nobles of nature's own creating,' had not the opportunity of rising, 'through distinguished merit,' to the highest places of power, and the most eminent positions of rank, in the service of their country?

He had already by his pen, as it has been shown, as well as in his public speeches, pointed out the importance of shortening the parliaments, as a certain means of putting an end to the misrule which, under the Whig *regime*, was becoming so deplorable. 'There is reason to believe,' was his repeated assurance, 'that the consequence of this policy would be the election of a House of Commons the great majority of which would be influenced by the same wishes,'—the wishes, namely, of a dismissal of the Whigs from power, and the reversal, or modification, of measures which, in their hands, were so obviously proving dangerous to the institutions of the country, and injurious to the welfare of many of the most important interests and industries of the people.

The first Whig-Reformed parliament, as we shall see, had but a brief existence. Its dissolution had to be determined upon within two years of its assembling, owing to the Whig ministry being unable to manage it; and not many months afterwards, the Whig Prime Minister—the author of the Reform Bill that was to enable so *stable* a Liberal ministry to be established and sustained, and to create so much peace, prosperity, and general contentment in the kingdom—was himself under the humiliating necessity of giving up the game in despair, and retiring from political life, disheartened and disgusted. Such a result as this was Disraeli's opportunity; for not only was it fulfilling his predictions, and proving the appositeness of his policy, but the general election that it necessitated seemed to present a hopeful chance of his at length, in a little while, entering parliament.

The interval, however, was so full of public excitement, and so pregnant with political events, all more or less affecting Mr. Dis-

raeli's peculiar position, and influencing his political career, that we must devote a few pages to a brief record of the more prominent incidents of the occasion, before proceeding to notice his third attempt, which was now not very far off, to obtain a seat in the House of Commons.

The state of things in the political world,—and, indeed, the state of the country generally at this time,—has been so tersely yet so truly described by a well-known pen, and that the pen of one of totally opposite views to Disraeli and his bitter critic—and therefore with no bias in favour of the subject of our memoir—that we prefer to give a brief quotation from it here instead of any account of our own. 'At this period,' it is observed, 'the rural districts were in a very unprosperous condition. The landlords complained that they could get no rents, the farmers that they could get no profits, and the labourers, maddened by their misery, had committed wild outrages in several parts of the country. In those days people had still a strong belief in the omnipotence of government, and everybody was convinced that something should be done. It was not quite so easy to discover what that "something" should be. King's speech after King's speech alluded to agricultural distress, but ministers could agree on no measure; and committees sat for months on the subject, and could agree on no reports. But one thing was certain: the British farmer was more than ever convinced that he was the chief bulwark of the state, and that absolute ruin stared this bulwark in the face. Another conviction had also settled in the mind of the farmer, that from the Liberal administration, at least, there was no hope of relief. In 1834, the ministry of Earl Grey had sunk to the last stage of impotence. They were hated by the King, they were in a minority in the House of Lords, and their own majority in the House of Commons bullied them without mercy. Divided against themselves, in the beginning of 1834, they had, about the middle of the year, come to an open rupture.'[1] These remarks enable us to furnish impartial

[1] 'Lord Beaconsfield: A Biography.' By T. P. O'Connor, M.P.

evidence of the wretched state of things which prevailed under Whig rule and Liberal reform, and of which Disraeli, as in duty bound, did not fail to take advantage. He had foreseen and foretold the political troubles that were approaching; and now that they had actually and fearfully come to pass, it had become his duty, as a public man and an aspirant to political pre-eminence, to endeavour to assist in extricating his country from the evils that were troubling it. There was nothing singular in such a course. It was a plain, straightforward proceeding—public-spirited and patriotic—which was signally attested by, and illustrated in, his subsequent career, as one of the most distinguished British statesmen since the days of Pitt.

Naturally enough, and necessarily, too, his attention was first given to his own county of Buckinghamshire, where the industrious classes in general, but the agriculturists in particular, were suffering severely under the prevalent distress that had arisen from the political ascendency of the Whigs and Liberals of the day. The first public expression of discontent was at a public meeting, in November, 1834, for the preparation of a petition to parliament. A committee of three was appointed for the purpose, of whom Mr. Disraeli was one; and it was his pen, we believe, as being that of a ready writer, which his colleagues were only too glad to employ in the performance of their important task. It was set forth as 'the petition of the nobility, gentry, clergy, land-owners, and occupiers in the county of Buckingham,' who complained that 'although a select committee of the House of Commons on the state of agriculture had acknowledged the extreme depression of agriculture that existed, and the heavy burthens that oppressed all those depending on the cultivation of the soil, yet their situation, so far from being endeavoured to be improved, had been considerably deteriorated, so that at present the distress exceeded any degree of suffering experienced in their memory; while in its prevalence it had ruinously reduced the rent of the landlord, the capital of the farmer, and the wages of the peasants, and threatened, unless its progress be immediately and effectually arrested, to shake to its very foundations the framework

of the empire.' This was a terrible indictment to present against a superlatively Liberal government, and a newly re-formed and boastedly popular House of Commons.

The petition thus reasonably and righteously concluded:—'That your petitioners recognize with the highest satisfaction the allusion of his Majesty, in his most gracious speech from the throne, to the distressed state of agriculture, and the sympathy expressed by your honourable House in following up the report of the select committee by a resolution that not only recognized the existence of their sufferings, but even indicated a method by which they might be alleviated; feelings of satisfaction, however, which were only equalled by the regret and mortification experienced by your petitioners on hearing that this resolution was almost immediately rescinded. Under these circumstances, your petitioners are again under the necessity of soliciting the immediate attention of your honourable House to their perilous situation, to earnestly entreat some prompt and satisfactory measure of relief'—an entreaty that, alas! was made utterly in vain. And no wonder. For brand new, and duly reformed though it was, after the most approved and popular fashion of a 'liberal and enlightened' age, its vitality was already well nigh gone; and he who, amid the deafening and distracting cheers of the populace, had been the chief creator of the revolutionised estate of the realm, was on the point of retiring in disgust from it altogether! But it was only, we repeat, what Disraeli had himself predicted. And it is not surprising, therefore, that he had gained the confidence of the people of Buckinghamshire of all classes.

The fate of this petition, and the growing excitement of the public mind all around, induced the County Agricultural Association to organize a great meeting, which, to quote a remark of one of its deriders, 'was to warn ministers against evil courses; and no means,' it was artfully added, 'were spared to make the meeting imposing.' The form of this important demonstration was after the good old English fashion of a public dinner, which was held in the Town Hall at Aylesbury, and was presided over by the Duke

of Buckingham, father of the then popular Marquis of Chandos of that day, who had, by his active and zealous exertions in support of the agricultural interest, gained the hearts of the farmers all over the country, but more particularly in his native county of Buckinghamshire, where he had become a universal favourite, but who, until this occasion, would not appear to have had the personal acquaintance of Mr. Disraeli. The meeting was one that fully realised what had been somewhat sneeringly and satirically, perhaps enviously, prophesied of it,—it *was* most 'imposing,' and, altogether, constituted a sign of the times which evidently struck terror into the hearts of the adverse faction. The mortification of that faction was evinced by their animadversions, not only upon the noble house of Chandos, but also upon Disraeli, who took no prominent part in the festive proceeding—being at that period scarcely known, save by name and partial repute, either to the noble Duke or his Grace's son, the noble Marquis. 'Mark,' writes a critic of the proceedings, 'how conscious son and father show themselves of their dignity! The Marquis of Chandos spoke of his father as "the *noble* Duke who presides in the chair," as much as to say, "Vulgar folk, behold how even *I* bow before the ducal dignity of my sire!"' And why not? If others—'all and sundry'—courteously observed the usual conventionalities of civilised and refined society, why not a son to his father? Would it have been to dutifully 'honour his father,' as the very Decalogue itself enjoins, had he done otherwise?

The Radical sneer at Mr. Disraeli's position on the occasion, though less curious, perhaps, was equally pitiful. We have already said that he modestly refrained from putting himself forward. He had scarcely then become a 'county man' of any note; and he had not yet connected himself with the landed or agricultural interests of the country. He was present at the banquet as one warmly interested in the object in view, but so were hundreds of others with whom he was content to mingle—to place himself on a level with them: with the same intentions as the rest, no doubt, evidently intending to be *a listener* rather than *a speaker*. He might, one

may be sure, had he chosen, been in as conspicuous a position as the best and the highest; but he preferred being aloof, a delighted spectator, doubtless, but not an actor, in so gratifying a festivity. And now see how a Radical writer uses this circumstance for critical purposes! 'But where,'—he says,—'amidst all this self-gratulation, all this virtuous chuckling of the aristocrats, where, O where, is poor Mr. Disraeli? Apparently he is not thought much of by these magnates; and his presence at this banquet is an incident of the most trifling importance. Indeed we find in one of the reports that his name occupied the last place in the list of those present; and, from the newspaper accounts, we are inclined to think he occupied a seat among the general ruck, and not on the Olympian height of the *dais*, where the *dii majores* ate, drank, and orated.' Strange that so cute and so observant a chronicler should have forgotten to call to remembrance that

> 'Lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
> Whereto the climber upward turns his face.'

Mr. Disraeli must, of course, if ever attempts of this nature, whether to disparage or to deride him, chanced to meet his eye, or otherwise come to his knowledge, have treated them,—as he could so well afford to do,—with supreme indifference, regarding them, if at all, 'but as the idle wind that passeth by;' and the more so, inasmuch as they are, we submit, in the main and in their meaning, entirely unfounded. For Mr. Disraeli, notwithstanding his studied unobtrusiveness and retirement, *had*, in due course, his health proposed in very complimentary terms, and very warmly responded to; and when, amidst most enthusiastic cheering, he rose to return thanks, at the urgent request of the noble chairman, supported by several of the leading men present, and enforced by general acclamation, he was induced to ascend the *dais* or platform, he delivered therefrom a congenial and eloquent speech to the following effect:—'He much regretted,' he said, 'that they had placed him in so eminent a situation, because he was afraid he had done nothing to deserve it. It was, indeed, an

honour which he did not expect to receive, and in expressing his gratitude he feared he should express it but very feebly. The meeting had heard that evening of the present being a great crisis in the country. He would not quarrel with that word, for now no one could doubt that it became every person to examine his position most attentively. He had ever been of opinion that a conspiracy existed among certain orders in the country against what was styled the agricultural interest; and although he did not wish to introduce party politics on such an occasion, he must yet confess that he was somewhat pleased at the change which had recently taken place.' This remark called forth loud and hearty cheering, and was evidently, it was said, in recognition of the great services Disraeli himself had rendered in producing such a change in the public mind of the country.

But Mr. Disraeli's speech, as given above, had an addendum made to it, as soon as the cheering he had already elicited had subsided, so as to allow him to proceed; and this had reference to one who had also contributed materially to produce the change in question, and who was now following it up with the utmost energy and zeal,—we mean the Marquis of Chandos, to whom, as well as to his noble father, the Duke of Buckingham, Disraeli would appear at that time, as we have said, to have been personally almost unknown. It would have been highly remiss at such a meeting for one in his position, and with his views, to have avoided making a respectful and commendatory allusion to those noblemen who had honoured it with their presence, and were promoting its object by their influence, — though his doing so afforded another opportunity for his political assailants imputing to him the most unworthy motives, and otherwise misrepresenting him as 'currying favour with the aristocracy!'

Yet he spoke of the noble house of Chandos with becoming modesty, with manifest truthfulness, and altogether with great propriety. Alluding to the new Conservative Ministry of Sir Robert Peel, that had then displaced that of Lord Melbourne—which had

succeeded that of Earl Grey—he observed, referring to Lord Chandos, that 'when he found that one who, from his position in society, from his acknowledged talents, and his distinguished parliamentary career, and who was so well entitled to universal confidence, had not taken his expected place in the councils of his sovereign, he, for one, rather faltered in his confidence in the new ministry. The name of the noble lord would be a pledge that the interests of the agriculturists would not be neglected. Ought it to be said that a Knatchbull was there, and a Chandos was not? He was glad, however, to hear that all the new Cabinet was not yet formed, and he hoped it was in order that this Aylesbury meeting might first be held. The conduct of the Marquis of Chandos would be looked up to at the present moment by all parties; for he was one who could not but be admired and trusted for his firmness of purpose and consistency of character.' Now, surely, there was nothing in all this that was very extravagant, unreasonable, or adulatory. It was but the expression of a very general opinion, not in Buckinghamshire only, but throughout the country at large. Yet his Liberal opponents did not hesitate to charge it upon him as the most servile, artful adulation, obsequiousness, and toadying!

We allude to these carpings and animadversions to show how not only Disraeli's novels, but his speeches and his pamphlets, were telling on the excited mind of the opposing party in one direction, while they were helping to educate and enlighten that of a more genial and generous party in another. The opportunity having again arisen, in December, 1834, of fulfilling his promise of appealing a third time to the electors of High Wycombe for their parliamentary suffrages, he did not, for a moment, hesitate to avail himself of it. But once more, though decidedly the popular candidate, he still found the local Whig influence too strong for him to resist. Yet his canvassing and hustings' speeches on this, as on former occasions, were found to be most valuable *media* of sound and impressive Tory teaching and enlightenment; and although they might seem to 'waste their sweetness on the desert air' within the

Whig precincts of that still almost pocket-borough, they did not fail, it was soon apparent, to produce a powerful effect outside that political 'preserve,' and far beyond the bounds of even the spacious shire itself.

Among other contributions by Mr. Disraeli about this time, to the same end as before, were two *brochures* of considerable merit, one in prose, the other in verse,—the former entitled 'The Crisis Examined,' the latter a 'Revolutionary Epick.' The first was set forth as 'a genuine report of an address to the electors of High Wycombe, delivered in the town hall,' and containing both an exposition of his own views and an admonition as to the policy it was important the country should seek to have adopted. For instance, he thus stated the case as regards his own convictions of what was required, and his own political objects in pursuance of them. 'Unless I enter parliament,' he said, 'with a clear explanation of my own views, there is little chance of my acting with profit to you, or with credit to myself. I cannot condescend to obtain even that distinguished honour by jesuitical intrigue or casuistical cajolery. I cannot condescend, at the same time, to be supported by the Tories because they deem me a Tory, and by the Liberals because they hold me a Liberal. I cannot stoop to deception, or submit to delusion.' Again: 'I think the necessary measures may be classed under four heads: Financial Relief, Ecclesiastical Reform, Sectarian Reform, Corporate Reform.' We have already noticed his views of the two first of these reforms; and of the third, that as to the corporations, he had no sympathy with either the Whig or Radical ideas on the subject; rather, as with reforms in general, he would 'preserve what was good, but change or abolish what was bad,'—in illustration of his fundamental principle of 'measures, not men'—which he maintained, he said, for this simple reason, 'that for the last four years (under the Whig *regime*) we have had men and not measures, and I am weary of them.' Or, if those same Whigs, or men of a similar political kidney, were still to be endured in office, would they not, as a constituency, insist on the axiom aforesaid being adopted and

enforced. 'Is your confidence in the Whigs,' he asked them, 'so implicit, so illimitable, that you will agree to a perpetual banishment of their political rivals from power? Are you prepared to leave the Whigs without opposition, without emulation, without check?'—questions that were now answered, there and everywhere, with indignant cries of 'No!'

The 'Revolutionary Epick,' though, as its name would imply, of a less prosaic character, was scarcely, in its moral at least, less preceptive than the 'Crisis Examined;' and, at the same time, as its poetic nature allowed it to be, more fanciful, and more eccentric —though still highly significant and salient. As its preface explains both its contents and its construction better, perhaps, than any quotations from it would do, we here submit the following extract therefrom. The plains of Troy are the location referred to, when it says:—'Wandering over that illustrious scene, surrounded by the tombs of heroes, and by the confluence of poetic streams, my musing thoughts clustered round the memory of that immortal song to which all creeds and countries alike respond, which has vanquished Chance, and which defies Time. Deeming myself, perchance too rashly in that excited hour, a poet, I cursed the destiny that had placed me in an age that boasted of beings non-poetical. And while my fancy thus struggled with my reason, it flashed across my mind, like the lightning that was then playing over Ida, that in those great poems which rise, the pyramids of poetic art, amid the falling and the fading splendour of less creations, the poet hath ever embodied the spirit of his time. Thus the most heroic incident of a heroic age produced in the Iliad an Heroic Epick; thus the consolidation of the most superb of empires produced in the Æneid a Political Epick; the revival of learning, and the birth of vernacular genius, presented us in the "Divine Comedy" with a National Epick; and the Reformation and its consequences called forth from the rapt lyre of Milton a Religious Epick. And the spirit of my time, shall it alone be uncelebrated? Standing upon Asia, and gazing upon Europe, with the broad Hellespont alone between us, and the shadows

of night descending on the mountains—"What!" I exclaimed, "is the Revolution of France a less important event than the Siege of Troy? Is Napoleon a less interesting character than Achilles? For me remains the Revolutionary Epick."' Then, adverting to his own personality in such a connection, he adds,—'I am not one who finds consolation for the neglect of my contemporaries in the imaginary plaudits of a more sympathetic posterity. The public will then decide whether this work is to be continued and completed, and if it pass in the negative, I shall without a pang hurl my lyre to limbo.' It might not literally be that it did actually 'pass in the negative;' for the stirring events that almost immediately followed its publication became quite absorbing enough to put it aside. But it was never resumed.

Mr. Disraeli's third defeat at High Wycombe was, as we have seen, in December, 1834, on the occasion of a general election, parliament having been dissolved on Sir Robert Peel's accession to the Premiership—to be, as it proved, but the temporary successor of Lord Melbourne; and the Aylesbury agricultural banquet, of which mention has been made, had special reference to the conjuncture that had arisen. It must be admitted that Mr. Disraeli had at this time begun to show a change of front. Any such change in his political principles, however, that his adversaries charged as being involved in it, was, as we have already shown, more apparent than real. But the handle made of it by his opponents at Wycombe had, doubtless, mainly to do with his rejection for the third time by a constituency which there had been so much reason to believe was turning in his favour. In his addresses to them, however, he made no attempt to conceal, though every endeavour to justify, the course he was pursuing, as one that was called for, he contended, by the changing circumstances of the times, and necessary for affording him an opportunity of assisting to promote what he conceived to be the highest interests of the country. The ancient familiar proverb of *tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis*, was, in fact, in the mutations of legislation and government, and the vicissitudes of political

parties, receiving a far more striking than beneficial illustration. The proverb just quoted virtually declares that 'the times are perpetually changing, and that mankind change with them.' And at no period of English history, perhaps, since that of the Revolution of 1688, was this course of change, as one of a political, as well as moral and social mutability, more signal than at that of the Parliamentary Reform *mania*, as it has often been not altogether inaptly called, to which we are referring. It is still probably only too true, now-a-days—as most certainly it was then—that, as the proverb aforesaid implies, there is nothing fixed or stable, as regards politics at least, either in situations or opinions. The poet sententiously tells us, that

> 'Men change with fortune, manners change with climes,
> Tenets with books, and principles with times.'

But it is not always, one would hope, that *principles* thus change. And certainly there is no sufficient reason to conclude that such was really the case in Disraeli's instance, whatever ingenuity and artifice his detractors may, in their exuberance of party spirit, and their intenseness of envy, have employed to expose it.

Mr. Disraeli's own apology, whether for any seeming change of party sides, or any actual modification of political views, affords, we cannot but think, an irrefutable answer to the charges of his assailants. 'The truth is, gentlemen,' he said in one of his later speeches of that day at Wycombe, 'a statesman is now very much the child of circumstances, the creation of his times. For a statesman is essentially a practical character; and when he is called upon to take office, he is not to inquire what his mere opinions might or might not have been upon this or that subject—he is only to ascertain the needful and the beneficial, and the most feasible manner in which affairs are to be constitutionally carried on. The fact is, the conduct and opinions of public men, at different periods of their career, must not be too curiously contrasted in a free and aspiring country. People have their passions; and it may even be the duty of public men occasionally to adopt sentiments with which they do not altogether

sympathise, because the people must have leaders.' He might opportunely enough have added that there must, too, be political parties to lead! Even Washington has put it on record that 'parties in free countries are useful checks upon the administration of the government, and serve to keep alive the spirit of liberty.' Not however, he has added, that 'the spirit of party was to be too much encouraged, since from a natural tendency there would always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose; and there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be, by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it.' These views of the great American patriot were quite at one, we believe, with those of Disraeli, who himself, too, it may not here be out of place to observe, was ever as careful to keep 'within the lines' of our *monarchical*, as Washington was within those of their *republican* constitution.

With such sound sentiments, and such confident assurances, as these, well might Disraeli add to his honest and hearty avowal of them—'I laugh, therefore, at the objections against a man, that at a former period of his career advocated a policy somewhat different to his present one: all I seek to ascertain being, whether his present policy be just, necessary, expedient; whether, at the present moment, he is prepared to govern the country according to its present necessities.'

But as well as thus laughing at those who were so busy and so persistent in raising unreasonable and hypercritical objections to the political course he was himself so rationally pursuing, he could laugh much more heartily—and with infinitely greater provocation—at those he felt it his duty to oppose, and to rebuke, as the ministers of the day. 'The *Reform* ministry, indeed!' he, in his own peculiar sarcastic vein, exclaimed; 'why, scarcely an original member of that celebrated body now remained! Whatever has become of them, gentlemen? You remember, no doubt, the story of Sir John Cutler's silk hose. Those famous stockings forcibly remind me of this famous ministry; for, really, between Hobhouse darns and Ellice

botching, I hardly can decide whether the hose are silk or worsted! The *Reform* ministry! save the mark! I dare say, now, some of you have heard of Mr. Ducrow, that celebrated gentleman who rides upon six horses at once. What a prodigious achievement! It really seems impossible. But you have confidence in Ducrow. You fly to witness it. Well, unfortunately one of the horses is ill, and a donkey is substituted in its place. But Ducrow is still admirable; there he is, bounding along, in a fine spangled jacket, and gorgeous cork slippers. The whole town is mad to see Ducrow riding at the same time on six horses! But now two more of the gallant steeds are seized with the staggers, and, lo! three jackasses in their stead! Still Ducrow persists, and still announces to the public that he will ride round his circle every night on six steeds. At last, all the horses are knocked up, and now there are half-a-dozen donkeys! What a change! Behold the hero in the amphitheatre, the spangled jacket thrown on one side, the smart cork slippers on the other. Puffing, panting, and perspiring, he pokes one sullen brute, thwacks another, cuffs a third, and curses a fourth; while one brays to the audience, and another rolls in the sawdust. Behold the late Prime Minister and the *Reform* ministry! The spirited and snow-white steeds have gradually changed into an equal number of sullen and obstinate donkeys! while Mr. Merryman, who, like the Lord Chancellor (Brougham), was once the very life of the ring, now lies his despairing length in the middle of the stage, with his jokes exhausted and his bottle empty!'

It was during that earlier period of his public career which we have just been discussing that, perhaps, the assaults of misrepresentation and the shafts of calumny were more boldly and most systematically directed against him; for his ability, his genius, his power to rise and become formidable, was clearly perceived and keenly felt, though for a long time unacknowledged, by his envious and often affrighted opponents; and it is on this account that we have been induced to dwell somewhat at length on incidents and circumstances of that period, which may rather be considered as introductory to

the actual development of his political career; for he was not yet, be it remembered, in parliament, though the time was then fast approaching when he should take his seat there, and begin in good earnest that successful pursuit of statesmanship which so rapidly raised him to the eminence he soon afterwards began to enjoy in the great council of this nation.

Before concluding the present chapter and entering, as we are about to do, on new, still more exciting, and soon more important and more auspicious phases of his political career, it may be interesting even briefly to mention his doings in literary life. For he was seldom, if ever, idle; and there was this peculiar and beneficial characteristic of his literary labours: that they were always designed and directed to subserve, directly or indirectly, the more important political purposes of his public career. Among the productions of his pen during the few years we have been referring to may be enumerated the following, in addition to those that have already been incidentally noticed:—'The Rise of Iskander,' devoted to describing the revolt of a Christian against Mohammedan rule; 'Ixion in Heaven,' and the 'Infernal Marriage,' literary burlesques of the fashion and character of the age which, down to that time, had long been popular. These, with the others, were the principal productions of his literary leisure, for such it had become, amidst the business, the bustle, and the excitement of his advancing political career.

CHAPTER IX.

ATTACK AND DEFENCE.—AN EXCITING PERIOD.

'He makes no friend who never made a foe.'—*Tennyson.*
'The good are better made by ill.'—*S. Rogers.*

LORD Melbourne's administration, in immediate succession to Earl Grey, in the second session of the first reformed parliament, was but of short duration, lasting only one hundred and thirty days. Reform had evidently not improved, but had apparently deteriorated, the character of the House of Commons. The nation, too, had got disappointed and discontented with the practical results of the reform which it had, as many thought, shaken the constitutional fabric of the realm to accomplish. The Whigs, as the prime movers in the revolutionary changes that had been so unskilfully, and with so much violence produced, had not only begun to be angry with their Radical allies in the work that had been so eagerly and anxiously effected, to the terror and alarm of the more quiet and sober-minded portion of the community, but to quarrel among themselves. It is a Liberal pen that thus describes how so large a body of the lately rampant reformers had found reason to demonstrate, that 'a change had come o'er the spirit of their dream,' and how the influence of the revulsion was disturbing the reform ministry, and the reformed parliament also:—'An important change had come over the political world. The ministry of Lord Grey, sunk to the last degree of impotence, had required re-casting. Lord Melbourne, who succeeded Lord Grey, was not much more successful. Towards the end of the year *he*, too, was dismissed, and the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel were sent for.' Sir Robert, after the Duke and he had held several confidential

consultations with the King, and some rather critical conferences with the more prominent and influential members of the Conservative party, accepted the responsibility of forming a new ministry, which he found less difficulty in doing than was at first apprehended; taking the Premiership himself, with the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, and assigning the important position of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Duke of Wellington—restoring the office of Lord Chancellor to Lord Lyndhurst, and that of Home Secretary to Mr. Goulburn. Of course Mr. Disraeli would not expect to be thought of in these arrangements. They had his entire approval and support, no doubt; but he was not yet in parliament, nor had he then any certain prospect of being. As it turned out, however, this was of no great consequence, for the ministry of Sir Robert Peel only lasted about four months. The House of Commons, under the reformed system of representation, although it differed with and disturbed both Lord Grey's and Lord Melbourne's administrations —both of which were Liberal ones, differing only in degree—yet could not be expected to support that of Sir Robert Peel. A dissolution, therefore, necessarily ensued, followed immediately by a general election. This second new parliament within two years assembled early in February, 1835; and it soon became evident that, although, to a considerable extent, it proved to be an improvement on its predecessor, the constituencies had not yet become sufficiently sobered to return a House of Commons that would support a Conservative government; and after a few weeks of mainly preliminary procedure—much of it, ever and anon, showing a most unreasonably hostile feeling to the ministry—its chief, Sir Robert Peel, was, by an adverse vote, obliged to resign; and he was at once succeeded by Lord Melbourne, who now entered upon a Premiership of the longest duration since that of Lord Liverpool, and which included the interesting and important events of the accession of Queen Victoria, her Majesty's coronation, and her marriage.

One result of the restoration of the Whig ministry to office, in the spring of 1835, was to afford an opportunity to Mr. Disraeli

to make another and still more vigorous effort to get returned to parliament. He had now risen to a respectable position in political life, young though he still was; and had, in doing so, given such signal marks of political ability and oratorical power, as to render it remarkable that one so eminently qualified, and altogether so well cut out for parliamentary success, should be allowed to remain outside the walls of St. Stephen's.

In the new arrangements for the resuscitated Whig ministry, Lord Melbourne had appointed Mr. Henry Labouchere (afterwards Lord Taunton) Master of the Mint, which required him to resign his seat in parliament for Taunton, and he at once appealed to the constituency for re-election, when he found himself opposed by Mr. Disraeli, in the Conservative interest, and professing to be an earnest and a determined opponent of the new ministry.

There was no mistake now as to the course Mr. Disraeli had found it to be his duty to pursue. Nor could there be any surprise that he should have decided on that course. Any indications he might be thought to have hitherto given of a leaning towards the Radicals, had by this time been explained away, and put an end to. He had sought, or rather he had accepted, the transient assistance, as has been shown, of the Radicals for a specific purpose — the removal of the Whigs from office; and that purpose had, temporarily at least, been served. And though the Whigs had contrived to return to office, circumstances had in the meantime arisen to draw the Radicals, or many of them, back to a Whig alliance, which put it out of the question for Mr. Disraeli to look for any support in that quarter for the future, even had he desired it; and as he now had, moreover, so much reason, and such opportunities, to speak out in the exposition of his constitutional principles, and in his advocacy of the constitutional cause, most of the leading, and, of course, all the extreme Radicals, became as antagonistic as the Whigs themselves.

Such, at once, appeared to be the state of things when he came forward to oppose Mr. Henry Labouchere's re-election for Taunton.

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